Birds On My Brush

Carole M. Lidgold

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Edited by: Sharon Crawford
Published by: Brookridge Publishing House

Printed in Canada

ISBN 978-0-9689381-1-9

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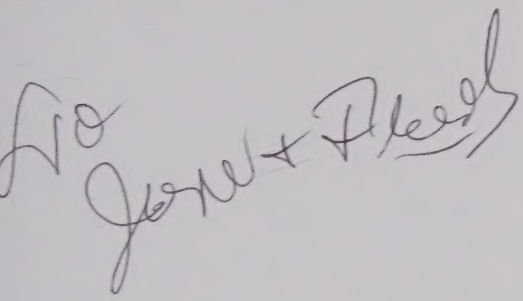

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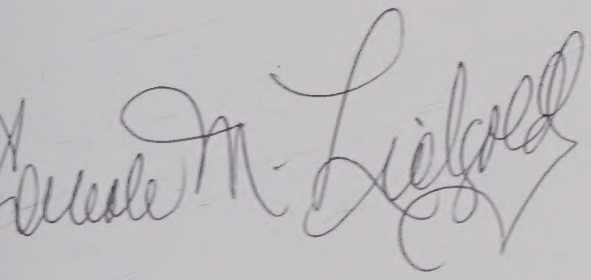
1763 - 1807



Birds on My Brush

One

Matthew Purcell paced up and down the long hallway, stopping briefly in front of the bedroom door. The thick door muffled all sound from within so he continued pacing. His soft-soled slippers made no noise as he trudged from one end of the hall to the other. His weathered face showed deep anxiety, his eyes showed fear. Nervous servants tiptoed quietly about their duties, as they whispered amongst themselves.

He had been pacing the shadowed hallway for many hours, his hands buried deep in his pockets. His feet were chilled from contact with the stone floor that the carpet and his slippers could not warm sufficiently. Candles on a table had burned down in the holder and a quiet servant stepped around him to replace them. Matthew's hair stuck out at odd angles where he had pushed it off his brow, or brushed his fingers anxiously through it. His eyes stared vacantly at the floor as he moved along it. A lengthy dressing gown flapped wildly around him as he shambled back and forth. He often stopped in front of the door, wishing he could see through it, then continued pacing. Suddenly the bedroom door opened and Matthew raced toward it.

A weary-looking woman stood in the doorway, her apron splattered with drops of blood, and her long grey skirt wet where she had wiped her hands. She smiled and opened the door wider.

"It was a struggle, sir," the woman said, "but both live."

"Thank God," Matthew cried. "Can I go in?"

"Yes, sir," the woman said. "They're both weak, so don't stay long."

Matthew rushed into the room, then slowly approached the bed where his wife lay. Her face was pale, and she looked lost among the covers.

"Nan," he said gently taking her small hand in his large ones.

Nan slowly opened her eyes and gazed at him. She saw him through a haze of exhaustion, through pain that sliced through her body, and tried to smile. The elderly woman stood behind him.

"She'll be all right, sir. She just needs to rest."

"And the child?"

"Right here," the woman said pulling back the covers where a pallid infant lay in Nan's arms.

'Will it live?"

"Perhaps. It was a difficult birth. She hasn't started feeding yet."

"She!"

"Yes, sir. You have a daughter."

Nan lay quiet in her bed, her beautiful face wet with beads of moisture and tendrils of dark hair clung to her forehead. The baby was sleeping beside her. It had been a struggle to birth her first child and she had almost died. Two previous pregnancies had resulted in miscarriages. This pregnancy had been successful but the baby was very small. The experienced midwife had kept both her and the child alive.

Matthew sat beside her, on the edge of the bed, and caressed her trembling fingers. The child was wrapped in a warm blanket, as the spring warmth had not penetrated the thick walls of the country house. Soon the child would need to be fed and the midwife was there to help.

"Leave her now, sir" the midwife said, "let her rest and feed the child."

Matthew Purcell looked down at his gentle wife and their sleeping child. For a moment his happiness that both were well was pushed aside. His first born child should have been a son. A son to

follow in his father's footsteps, to teach him the important things to succeed, and to be proud of. Matthew wanted a son to ride with, hunt with and to look up to him with respect. All the things he'd done with his own father. A son would help him build, needed a boy's muscles to lift the heavy stone that was used in construction. Two boys had died too early to become the sons he wanted and this time Matthew hoped Nan would finally give him a son. He loved Nan but a son was something special to a father. Would he ever have a son? The shadow of disappointment passed slowly as he stared at his wife and daughter. At least this child was alive.

Reaching out his hands, toughened by years of work with limestone, he picked up his daughter. How tiny and fragile she was. Would she survive to become the child they had yearned for these many years?

The baby had long eyelashes against the pale skin of her cheeks. Her eyes were closed after the long battle to enter the world. She breathed easily in her sleep and seemed to sigh in contentment as she lay in her father's arms.

He loved her already as he smiled at his tiny daughter. She was like a rose, beautiful and delicate, her skin pink and warm. A rosebud awakening into bloom. As he held her, she opened her eyes and stared at him.

"You are a beautiful child," Matthew whispered to his daughter, "and we shall have so many days together. We shall call you Sarah, Sarah Ann after my infant sister, but you will live. Someday maybe you'll have a brother."

Nan Purcell smiled at the two of them. At last she had given Matthew a live child. As for another one, time would tell if she lived to have another child. Two boys had not lived and she was grateful that although it was a girl, she was born alive. Drifting off to a painful sleep, Nan wondered if she would survive to see the child grow.

"Give her to me, sir," the midwife said and Matthew reluctantly handed Sarah to her.

There was a nursery connected to Nan's bedroom all ready for the child. Sunshine streamed into the room warming the cradle where Sarah would spend her first days. The midwife gently lowered the baby into the cradle. Sarah awoke and began to cry lustily with pangs of hunger.

"Ah child," the midwife said, "so you are finally hungry. Alright, you eat and grow healthy." She lifted her up and took her into Nan who had awakened at the sound.

Tears filled Nan's eyes as she took the child and held her to feed. Sarah sucked eagerly at her mother's breast and Nan knew that this child would survive. Matthew crept back into his wife's bedroom and kissed her cheek.

"I'm sorry the baby's a girl," Nan said softly.

"She's beautiful," Matthew replied, "we'll have sons later. Already she looks just like you."

"At least you will have someone to remind you of me if I die," Nan said sadly.

"You're just tired. You'll soon be strong. Sarah needs her mother to watch her grow into a beautiful young lady. I need you too."

"Our daughter," Nan said softly then kissed the top of Sarah's fuzzed head, "we have a daughter."

"A beautiful daughter," Matthew replied watching her suck at her mother's breast, "and a hungry one."

The year was 1763 in Hereford, England where Matthew Purcell was a stone mason and architect. In his office, after the birth of his daughter, he was restless. His office was strewn with paper waiting for the precise details of the buildings he was working on. His father had been a field worker and Matthew had been fortunate to escape this. As a child he had been interested in

building and often helped with stone additions to the owner's house. The builders gave him small things to do like mixing mortar then laying the stones. He begged them to teach him all they knew and soon he was better than the builders. Now patrons paid him generously for designing and building additions as well as elegant homes. He had a reputation for quality work. Today, Matthew couldn't concentrate on his work, tired from his long night of vigil and excited at the birth of his child. He pulled a satin cord hanging on the wall and summoned a maid. There was a soft tap on the door and a uniformed girl entered.

"Yes, sir," she said curtseying.

"Bring out two of my best bottles of wine and tell the staff to gather in the sitting room. Tell them to stop whatever they're doing and join me in celebrating the birth of my daughter."

"Yes, sir," the maid said, curtseying again then hurried off to tell Renfrew, the head servant who always served the master.

The servants gathered in the elegant sitting room with tall windows overlooking the garden where spring flowers were budding. Renfrew presented two bottles of wine on a silver tray to his master, with one glass.

"Bring out more glasses, Renfrew," Matthew ordered and gasps echoed throughout the room.

"Yes sir," Renfrew replied, his usually serious face crinkled in a smile. He brought out ten more crystal glasses then popped the corks of the two bottles of wine. The glasses were filled and handed to the giggling maids and the cook.

"To Sarah Ann," Matthew said raising his glass, "may she live in health and happiness."

"Health and happiness to Sarah Ann," echoed the servants sipping the wine from the glasses that they regularly cleaned but had never before used.

Upstairs in the nursery Sarah Ann slept, fed and warm beneath the eiderdown quilt. Baby birds were being born on the outside windowsill to proud parents who chirped their delight. The joyful music of the birds chirping to their new offspring filtered through Sarah's sleep. The sunshine danced across the blanket of her cradle and kept her warm. It was a good day to be born, when the sky was clear with many promises of a another spring. Sarah's life would be full of passion, joy, pain and a love of birds. Life would fulfill her dreams and then destroy them. Fate had already decreed that her life would end too soon.

Two

Dark clouds scudded across the sky hiding the sun, carrying a fine mist to dampen the English countryside. Nanny Jane hurried out of the nursery to bring her young charge inside after her airing. She was a girl of eighteen wearing a brown cotton dress, her face homely, and her hair hidden beneath a cap,. Her face was pale from working inside caring for a fretting child who always wanted her own way even at so young an age. Jane Harley came from a large family in a nearby county but had been fortunate to learn to read and write. She had been a housemaid with the curate when she was twelve and shown interest in reading. The curate's wife taught her to read after her duties were done and with no children of her own, considered Jane as a daughter. When the curate died, Jane had to look for another employer. The curate's wife had recommended her to the Purcells.

Without looking inside the carriage, Jane wheeled it inside the house. Reaching into the carriage she expected to find a sleeping child but her arms came up empty. The child was not there!

Nanny Jane panicked and ran wildly through the house screaming, "She's been stolen, the gypsies have her."

"What's the fuss now, Miss Jane?" Matthew asked calmly, stepping out of his office into the hallway full of chaotic servants inspecting the empty carriage.

"Sir, she's gone – the gypsies have her," Miss Jane replied, wringing her hands, tears cascading down her frightened face.

Matthew was suddenly frightened. There had been gypsies in the meadow. Then he smiled calmly.

"Has Mrs. Purcell got Sarah?" he asked and a sudden, sheepish silence settled over the servants, and Jane.

"I never thought of that, sir," Jane answered wiping her tears, comforted by the cook who patted her shoulder and laughed kindly.

"Should have thought of that myself," the cook muttered quieting the other servants with a stern look.

The servants crept back to their duties while Matthew and Jane went to the sitting room where Nan spent her mornings resting as she had never fully recovered her strength after Sarah's birth.

Nan lay on the sofa in the sitting room, a warm wrap around her shoulders against the morning dampness. Her dark hair was pinned up behind her head, her face relaxed as she read a book of poetry. She looked up as Matthew and Miss Jane entered, and she smiled in welcome.

"Is Sarah ready to see me?" she inquired then felt a stab of fear as she saw the panic on Miss Jane's face. "What is it, what's wrong with Sarah?"

"We thought she was with you, my dear," Matthew said gently trying to hide his own fear.

"With me? Miss Jane isn't she outside with you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Purcell, I only left her for a moment and I didn't see anyone around so I went inside to find her favourite toy, the little doll the cook made for her," Miss Jane cried, her plain face wrinkled with worry and more tears.

"We told you never to leave her alone," Nan moaned dropping her book, sinking back into the cushions of the sofa.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Miss Jane said falling to her knees beside the sofa, "the gypsies must have got her!"

"Now, now, both of you," Matthew said calmly, "let's not make this worse than it could be. Let's check the garden first. Maybe Sarah climbed out of the carriage."

"How could she," Miss Jane cried burying her face in her hands, "she's only a year and a half. I should never have left her alone."

"Well, if she's in the garden she'll be all right. She can't have crawled that far. Maybe the gardener has seen her."

The rain was still a fine mist but the heavy clouds promised more to come. Worried, fearful searchers checked under the bushes, among the flowers in the gardens for the missing Sarah. The gardener had not seen her. Nan collapsed and was sent to bed while a stable lad was sent for the doctor. It seemed that Sarah had crawled out of the garden through the gate in the stone wall or been taken. Rain now fell in large drops and the searchers were soaked to the skin. There was a dread that Sarah would never be found or would be found and perish from the effects of the rain.

Matthew was terrified that they would never find her. His curly hair was plastered to his head by the rain, his hands covered with mud. He strode up and down through the garden searching again where they had already searched, and did not feel the rain that soaked through his clothes to his skin.

"Sir, go inside," one of the servants said. "We'll find her, don't you worry."

"No, I must keep searching," Matthew replied, as he wiped the rain out of his eyes that was mingled with his tears.

A stable boy had ridden to the neighbours for help in the search. Those available searched outside the walled garden where thick bushes clung to a rocky hillside. Down at the end of the pathway, now a muddy stream, was a large pond populated by noisy ducks enjoying the rain. Everyone feared that Sara had fallen in and drowned and were relieved when there was no sign of her body. They kept searching in the rain that finally stopped but the sky was still grey with thick clouds.

Matthew's anxiety forced him to face the reality that she could not be found. The doctor ordered him into the house to let the servants and the neighbours continue the search. He paced up and down the hallway and refused to change into dry clothes. Nan lay in her bed sedated by the doctor to prevent her from pacing with her husband.

On one side of the pond were thick bushes where the ducks birthed their young in safety from predators. The rain could not penetrate the leaves and it was dry beneath the bushes. The ducks were disturbed by the searchers but instead of returning to their nests, moved from one side of the pond to the other as the searchers neared. Then the searchers moved on but the ducks did not return to float on the pond or to their nests.

Beneath one of the bushes a contented Sarah gazed at the pond. She crawled out and pulled herself up by clinging to a bush. Then she flopped down and stared at the ducks, who stared back.

She watched them skim across the water as she crawled near them, and laughed as she heard them quacking warnings of an intruder. When she arrived at the pond an hour before, on unsteady legs that collapsed several times beneath her, she had followed them around the edge of the pond. In her baby way she tried to imitate their sounds, waving her arms in imitation of their wings and splashed her hands in the water like they did with their wings. She followed them under the bushes to their nests and then tired, fell asleep. Once more, when she awoke, she tried to reach them, and then angry that she could not, began to cry. In her loudest voice she wailed out her feelings at not getting what she wanted.

Feet pounded the ground as the searchers raced toward the sound of the baby's cry. Suddenly Sarah was surrounded by jabbering people all trying to carry her at the same time and she cried louder.

"Matthew, she's been found," the doctor said relieved and Matthew ran out the door to greet the throng of people bringing his daughter home.

"Where was she?" he asked and was answered by a confusion of voices all trying to tell him at the same time.

"Quiet," shouted one of the men, "she was down at the pond and it seems she was under one of the bushes."

"The ducks," Matthew said, "she's always trying to see the ducks."

"Well," the man said, "I'm glad we found her safe."

"Thank you all of you," Matthew replied holding his screaming daughter tightly in his arms. "Will you come in for a warm drink?"

"Another time, Matthew," the man said, "quite a daughter you've got."

The neighbours smiled at each other, shook their heads in amusement, then wandered back to their homes wondering how Sarah had got out of the walled garden. An iron gateway should have kept her inside but it had large spaces between the bars for a small child to climb through.

Nan came running from the house when she heard that Sarah had been found and Matthew handed the child to her. Sarah stopped crying, gibbered happily in baby language and seemed to enjoy the attention from her parents.

"Oh you naughty child," Nan cried hugging her tightly, wiping the tears from her eyes, kissing Sarah's dirt streaked face.

"Make sure Miss Jane never leaves her again," said Matthew, exhausted and wet.

"Never, never again," Nan replied as they entered the house to be surrounded by servants overjoyed to see their favourite back safe. "Off to work with you, now. Where's Miss Jane?"

"Here, ma'am," the distraught girl answered timidly wondering if she would lose her position.

"I'm very disappointed in you Miss Jane. You were never to leave her alone and fortunately there's no harm this time," Nan scolded.

Jane began weeping , nodding her head, accepting her blame. "I'm sorry ma'am, it'll never happen again."

"No it will never happen again, and this is a warning," Nan said, "Take better care of her or you will be replaced. Now take her and give her a bath."

Jane took the struggling Sarah from Nan who seemed on the verge of collapsing, and Matthew helped her into the sitting room.

"Oh Matthew, what would we have done if we'd lost her," Nan cried tears spilling from her eyes onto his already wet shirt.

"Well, we didn't and she's safe," Matthew said, then started laughing. "Isn't she something, a child her age taking off on her own."

"You've spoiled her," Nan said crossly drying her tears, then smiled. "She has a mind of her own and the health to do what she wants."

"Birds, it's always birds she's after. How many times have we had to take her to see those ducks?

"You'd better get out of those clothes before you catch cold."

"I think I need a drink first," Matthew answered and poured out a brandy, as he continued to chuckle about the adventure of his wayward daughter.

In the nursery Jane scolded Sarah as she bathed away the dirt. Sarah squirmed as she always did in the bath, making strange sounds trying to sound like the ducks. Outside her window the sparrows chirped to their new brood of babies ready to begin their own lives. Sarah stopped sounding like the ducks and tried making sparrow sounds, only succeeding in blowing bubbles through her hands. The bubbles fascinated her and she cried when Nanny Jane

lifted her out of the water. Instead of sleeping Sarah played in her crib moving her arms as duck wings while Jane slept beside her in a rocking chair.

It was an unusually warm day, several days after Sarah went missing. Nanny Jane was outside with Sarah who was supposed to be sleeping in her carriage. Jane dozed then suddenly awoke feeling that something was wrong. Once more the carriage was empty. However this time, Jane saw Sarah.

Sarah was halfway through the bars of the gate and was all the way through when Jane reached the gate. By the time the gate was opened Sarah had crawled down to the pond and was giggling at the antics of the ducks splashing in the water.

"What a naughty child you are!" Jane scolded picking her up. Sarah began to scream, pointing at the ducks. "It's back into the garden for you." She held tightly to Sarah who struggled and screamed as if being carried off by a monster.

Matthew in his workroom heard the screams and rushed out to see what was wrong. He saw Miss Jane carrying Sarah into the garden, closing the gate behind her.

"She's done it again, sir," Jane said as Matthew took Sarah from her. "She crawled through the gate again."

"Well, get someone to put a board over the bars so she can't get out."

"Yes, sir," Jane replied as Matthew tried to quiet his screaming daughter who kept pointing toward the pond.

"So you want to see the ducks, do you," Matthew said to her and opened the gate, "well, let's go see them together." Sarah stopped crying and began making her version of duck sounds.

Matthew and Sarah sat beside the pond watching the ducks flutter their wings sending drops of water over themselves. Then they preened their white feathers flicking off feathers that drifted

down into the water. Several feathers floated near Sarah and she eagerly grasped them in her chubby hands. The ducks became used to the two humans and swam near them quacking. Sarah clapped her hands and tried to crawl after them but was restrained by her father. She did not cry because some of the ducks came to her.

Nan, who had been told of this second disappearance, came down to the pond with some dry bread. She remembered her childhood days when her nanny had given her bread to feed the ducks on the pond. She joined her husband and daughter and the three of them crumbled the bread and enticed the ducks to take it from their hands. Sarah laughed and enjoyed being near her beloved ducks.

Sarah fell asleep as her father carried her back to the house. Matthew and Nan often took her to the pond to see the ducks but Sarah never went there again by herself. The fence was boarded up.

Three

A letter was delivered to Matthew in his workroom. He looked at it and held it unopened in his hands. This was the one he had been anxiously awaiting. Slicing it open with the ivory letter opener, he quickly read the message it contained. His stared at the devastating words and let the letter fall from his hands onto his cluttered desk. He leaned back in his chair and stared miserably beyond the room into the garden outside.

Sarah stared through the open doorway at her father who sat very still at his desk. Matthew's eyes gazed vacantly out the window, his face wore a forbidding expression and she knew this was not the time to disturb him. In the past few days he had been upset about something and hardly spoken to his wife or daughter. They were both worried about him and tried to find out what was bothering him. Matthew had been avoiding them, spending time in his workroom or out on long walks. No one seemed to know what the problem was and Matthew kept it to himself.

Matthew leaned back in his chair, stretched his hands behind his head, and sighed deeply. At forty-five he was a handsome man, his hair beginning to show signs of gray. His face was bronzed by the wind and the sun as he worked outside watching his designs become reality. A trimmed beard was peppered with touches of gray, a thin moustache above his tense lips. Hard muscles bulged on his arms under his shirt, his chest muscles pulled the material tight.

Getting up stiffly from his chair, where he had been sitting for the past three hours, Matthew unlocked a cabinet drawer and pulled

out a tattered, yellowed piece of paper. He stared sadly at it and leaned against the cabinet. Once more he stared vacantly out the window not seeing the rain drizzling over the garden. Then he stuffed the paper into his shirt pocket, grabbed his heavy work jacket from a peg on the wall and opened the door that led into the garden.

Sarah hurried away from her father out into the garden to a bush where she had seen what she wanted to tell her father. At five years old, Sarah already had a mind of her own and did exactly what she wanted. Her light brown curls were soon wet with rain and her beautiful, chubby face scratched and muddy. Her frilly pink dress caught on a branch and tore as she bent down to retrieve what was beneath the bush. Her hands reached into the mud and touched a terrified, quivering object. Her fingers gently stroked the wet feathers of a tiny bird.

"It's all right, little bird," Sarah soothed as she pulled it toward her. She nestled it on her lap as she sat on the wet grass. "I'll help you get better."

Standing up Sarah wondered what to do with the bird since her father was not there to help. Where could she go to find someone who knew what to do with the ailing bird. Her mother was resting and would tell her not to worry about one little bird, there were so many. Beneath another bush, a thicker bush where it was dry, a pair of greedy eyes stared at her. One of the stable cats was interested in the bird.

"Harry will help," Sarah said, and ran toward the stables to her friend.

Harry, the stable boy, was combing tangles from his favourite horse's tail. Beauty was the mistress's mount and gentle with other riders. Unknown to anyone but him, Beauty also let Sarah ride her. Sarah was already a good rider for her age and no longer wanted to ride the ponies. She only rode the ponies when her parents watched.

When she was alone with Harry, she rode Beauty. He saw her coming and laughed at her appearance.

"So, what're you up to?" he asked, and Sarah opened her hands and showed him the tiny bird. "Well, put it here while I dry you off. You're a muddy mess!"

"Can you make it better?" Sarah asked as he dried her with a horse blanket, then wrapped it around her.

"Poor little Robin. We'll make him better."

This was not the first time Sarah had brought him a sick bird. The stable cats often caught one and either killed it or injured it. Sarah was always finding them and cried when they had to bury one in her bird cemetery.

Harry enjoyed being with Sarah who spent many hours with him in the stable watching him look after the horses. He taught her how to brush them and feed them. The first time she had found him in the stable no one in the house knew where she was. Harry told her to go home as this was no place for a young girl like her. She refused and followed him around on his duties. Finally he sent one of the other stable boys to let the servants know where she was. Her father came for her and she went back with him. But she kept coming to the stables again and again and he got used to her being around. After the second time, her father just laughed and spoke to Harry.

"Lad, she wants to do what she wants. Can you keep her out of trouble?"

"I don't mind her here, sir. I'll see she doesn't come to any harm."

Harry laid the injured bird on a table and delicately felt its wings. The bird's eyes were closed and it lay very still. It was in shock but its wings were not broken. A patch of skin showed where its feathers had been torn out, probably by one of the cats. Its legs had not been hurt and it was still breathing. Harry picked up the bird in his hands and laid it in a small box where there was a torn piece

of blanket.. Harry folded an edge of the material over the bird as Sarah leaned on the table, her nose next to the box where the bird lay.

"It'll be all right in a bit," Harry said and Sarah smiled. "Just in shock. Leave it here for awhile and it will fly away."

"I'll watch it. My mother always sits beside me when I'm not feeling well."

"Better get you cleaned up a bit, miss."

Harry picked up one of the horse brushes and started untangling the wet curls on Sarah's head. Then he wiped her muddy face and hands with a damp towel.

"Can't do much for your dress," Harry said.

"Is the bird well yet?"

"Soon. Its eyes are opening. See, it's trying to stand up."

"Can we feed it?"

"Got any worms?"

"I'll go get some," Sarah replied and would have run out into the rain to get some if Harry hadn't been holding on to her arm.

"It won't eat now," Harry said, laughing. "When it gets over its fright and flies away, then it will get its own. Oh, oh, you're in trouble!"

An angry Nanny Jane ran into the stable, shaking the raindrops off her cloak. She saw Sarah, the muddy mess of her dress and the tear where the branch had caught it. Sighing she approached her.

"I knew I'd find you here, Miss Sarah," she scolded then looked crossly at Harry. "Your mother won't like this mess you're in. Little girls are supposed to be quiet and tidy, not play in stables."

"I like it here with Harry," Sarah pouted as Nanny Jane grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the stable door. She looked at the sick bird, at Harry who nodded that he would look after it.

Matthew stared at Fairfield House, a crumbling, deserted shell of a once beautiful manor. Fallen stone lay where it had landed after

years of weather and neglect. The stone could be used again to restore the house to its former grandeur. Now it seemed it would be discarded under a new owner. He stepped inside the front door that dangled from one hinge, supported by a piece of wood he had put there to keep it from falling. When he was a boy the door had opened and closed behind him as he sat on the floor dreaming of himself as the Lord of the manor. He spent many hours dreaming of how he would rebuild the manor, the lavish parties he would hold in the ballroom if he was the owner. It was a dream that would never become reality.

Fairfield House had been one reason why Matthew had learned the trade of stonemason and the art of building design. The property had sat empty for fifty years because they could not find an heir to inherit it. Lawyers were unable to sell it because the will stated that it could not be sold, but must be kept until an heir could be discovered. As a child Matthew drew up plans then as a student drew up blueprints which he kept. If he couldn't become the owner, perhaps he could be the builder that restored it. Finally a descendant had been found who was willing to repair Fairfield House as his dwelling.

Several builders had submitted plans to the new owner, Matthew one of them. He had carefully reviewed his blueprints, visited the house to see how bad it was, then waited impatiently for the owner's response. The letter he received had stated that his plans were not accepted, as the owner wanted to change the appearance of the house and did not want to renew its former structure. Matthew was devastated, his dream smashed! How could the owner not see that it should be rebuilt as it was before? Its elegant design fitted well with the gardens that had once been filled with rhododendrons and roses, an oval pond where ducks and geese swam. Matthew had written to the owner many times to convince him that to destroy the design would be disrespectful of its history and the ancestors who

had built it. He had not received a reply from the new owner to any of his letters until today when he was informed that he was not the builder they wanted.

Matthew sat on the floor looking out the open door. The rain was still drizzling and the landscape of the overgrown lane with broken trees and tall weeds, was as dismal as Matthew's thoughts. His dream was dead and reality had shattered it in pieces.

Nan Purcell stared at the fragile beauty in the mirror. Tomorrow she would be thirty years old and she looked old. Thick, dark hair hung down her back, a few wisps curled around her pale face. Her eyes were dull and weary. She brushed her hair slowly then twisted it behind her head, and held it there with a silver clasp. She stood up and turned sideways to the mirror. Her nightgown hid the slight bulge. She was pregnant again.

Worry darkened her face as she thought of the two pregnancies since Sarah's birth. Both had ended early in miscarriages. Each time it had taken longer to regain her health, and longer to get rid of her disappointment. Matthew had told her again and again that they had Sarah, and that he wasn't disappointed. But she could see how much he wanted a son. Every man wants a son, and she was depressed that she couldn't give him one. Maybe this time. This time she wouldn't tell him she was pregnant until she was at least five months along. There was something bothering him and she didn't want to add to his worries.

The last time she lost the baby, he was so worried that she would die. She spent months in bed and when he was with her he constantly asked how she felt, telling her to make sure she took the medicine the doctor left. Then he paced the room when he thought she was sleeping. If she told him now he would force her to bed. She couldn't stay in bed for the next eight months. Last time she had felt so cutoff from everything and everyone. Sarah had tiptoed

around her like a lost little lamb and that upset her to see her so quiet and unnatural. No, she would not tell him right now and would be careful not to overwork herself this time. She'd let the servants do the cleaning work that she usually helped with. A sharp knock on the door roused her from her morbid thoughts.

"Come in," Nan called turning toward the door as Nanny Jane dragged in a very dirty Sarah.

"She's been down to the stable again, ma'am," Nanny Jane said sternly.

Nan laughed at her sad-faced daughter. It made her happy to see how healthy and active she was. Sarah got herself into so much trouble but Nan never complained. At least one child had survived and she wasn't going to spoil Sarah's fun.

""I'll tidy her up, Nanny Jane," Nan said, "you go for your tea."

"Yes, ma'am," she replied and hurried out of the room muttering to herself about mothers spoiling naughty daughters.

"Now, what have you been into Miss Sarah?" Nan smiled, pulling her daughter into her arms.

"I found a hurt bird, and Father was busy so I took it out to Harry in the stables."

"What was your Father doing?"

"He was just sitting in his chair but he looked angry."

"He's not angry, just worried about something. I thought you were supposed to be having a rest, like I was."

"I wasn't tired, and I saw the cat chase the bird."

"Is it all right?"

"Harry will make it all right."

"Well, let's get you cleaned up," Nan said, laughing, hugging her daughter which left dried dust on her nightgown, as they went into the nursery.

Four

Matthew stood on the second floor looking out through one of the gaping holes. The devastation of the building seeped deeply into him, its pain moaning through him as the wind blew freely through the open wounds. He silently cursed the new owner and his unimaginative plans to rebuild and destroy what could again be a historic beauty.The tower room on the north side of Fairfield House had fallen completely leaving gaping holes. At the top of the building other large blocks of stone had fallen and the roof was now home to a variety of birds. The house was still surrounded by mature trees, beautiful despite human neglect. It would take many years of careful work to restore the house to its former beauty.

Matthew watched the anxious birds darting through the air, disturbed from their nests by the human intruder. He was depressed and angry at the thought that he would not fulfil his dream. For the last time, in his mind, he rebuilt Fairfield House, block by block, seeing the tower once more stretched up high above the house offering a panoramic view of the countryside. A tower room was a place for a man to retire from his family and contemplate what only he could understand. A comfortable easy chair, a roaring fire against the evening or winter chill, to read or stand out on the balcony studying his property. The new owner did not want the tower rebuilt. He wanted to extend the house with larger rooms for the family he might someday acquire. Towers were antiques from times when protection from enemies needed a high viewing point.

Matthew had suggested in his architectural plan that more rooms could be incorporated from another part of the house to overlook the refurbished gardens. An L-shaped addition would enclose the garden and protect the flowers and shrubs from winter damage. Facing west the inhabitants could also view magnificent sunsets.

The new owner wanted trees destroyed to straighten the road to the front entrance. Previously it had curved delightfully through the trees, around a pond and past gardens. Matthew had never seen the beauty of this roadway, but only imagined what it had been. Now the pond was full of debris from 50 years of storms. The gardens were now part of the tall grass and weeds that led up to the house. But their beauty could be regained with expert attention and careful planning.

As Matthew dreamed on the second floor, below him on the ground a man stopped walking and stared up at the shadowed figure standing on the edge of the gaping hole. The man wore a long coat to keep out the dampness, on his head a tall hat with a wide brim where water dripped onto his shoulders. His face was angry, worried that the figure above him was trying to end his life in a suicide jump. He was relived when the intruder moved back into the building.

The man walked through the tall grass to the entrance of Fairfield House. He noticed the door propped open and stepped inside. Using his walking stick he cautiously tested the floor to reassure that it was safe enough to walk on. Footprints through the dust and fallen plaster showed him where the intruder had gone up the wide, stone stairway attached to the wall. Part of the banister had rotted away making it dangerous to lean on, the remainder coated with green mold.

The man began climbing the stairs, staying close to the wall, and used his walking stick for support instead of the banister. He brushed away dry leaves, and some wet leaves slippery from the rain that had penetrated through the glassless stairway window.

Slowly he made his way up to the second floor. At the top of the stairs he met Matthew about to start down. Matthew was rudely jerked back to reality when he saw the man, and reached out to grab the banister. It wobbled dangerously beneath his hand.

"What are you doing here?" the man asked angrily, as he barred Matthew's way.

"Saying goodbye to a dream," Matthew answered sadly, studying the stranger. "Why are you here?"

"This house belongs to me," the stranger replied, "and who are you?"

"Lord Melville!" Matthew gasped. "I'm Matthew Purcell."

"The builder?"

"Yes."

Lord Melville suddenly laughed and leaned back against the wall, his coat collecting mold and dirt. He was a young man about thirty-five, his body lean and tough from years with the army. Laughter continued to flow from him as he stared at the perplexed Matthew, so much laughter that he was forced to sit down on the stone step. Matthew didn't know what had caused this laughter but saw an opportunity to try once more to convince Lord Melville about his plan for Fairfield House. Lord Melville finally stopped laughing.

"Fate has had her way," Lord Melville sputtered, pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his face. "I vowed never to see you and consider your ludicrous plan."

"To restore Fairfield House as it once was is not ludicrous, but the only thing to do."

"But an obsolete tower, no I don't want one."

"But the design of the house would look hideous without one and no new additions could compensate for the ugliness."

Lord Melville laughed again, his face turned red with tears at the corners of his eyes. He dabbed at them with his now dirty handkerchief and looked at Matthew.

"So I've heard numerous times this week," Lord Melville said, smiling at Matthew who was confused.

"From who?"

"I've heard nothing but you and your plan from your good friends Jo Anna and Franklyn DeAstor. I'm staying with them since I arrived here last week. You have been the centre of our arguments."

"I'm sorry, but I hope you listened to them since you wouldn't hear me."

"They have been so angry with me for employing an architect that doesn't know Fairfield House or its history. They said you should be the one to rebuild it, but I stubbornly refused. Jo Anna hasn't spoken to me for days. Now it looks like I'm to be persuaded by fate."

"Well, now that you're here," Matthew said smiling, his anxiety and depression replaced by a sudden joy, "let me show you my plans for Fairfield House."

Lord Melville slowly stood up, laughed again, then shook Matthew's hand. "Alright," he said, "let's see what you want to do to my house."

Climbing to the top of the house up another disintegrating stairway to the third floor, Matthew explained his plans for Fairfield House. He vividly described the details of his plan, moving from room to room trying to make Lord Melville envision what he saw. On the main level of the house Matthew led him into the huge ballroom which showed the remains of its past splendour. A massive fireplace with an oak mantel stretched midway through the room. An enormous chandelier that once held a hundred or more candles, lay in pieces on the floor Across the hallway was the library its glass doors broken, barren of books. There was a music room that once held a grand piano and an empty platform where orchestras had performed. Down below in the dark basement, with a walkout to the garden, was a kitchen that once produced delicious smells of cooking from its fireplace.

Matthew talked on and on never giving Lord Melville a chance to ask questions. Lord Melville finally saw the vision of Fairfield House that Matthew saw and could be once again. In the garden Matthew, exhausted, finally stopped talking.

Facing the building Lord Melville was deep in thought. He was caught up in Matthew's dream of how the house could be, but his stubbornness kept him from telling this to Matthew. It would be expensive to cancel the company he had hired and although he could afford it, he hated to waste a penny. Matthew remained silent, his stomach knotted with tension as he waited for an answer.

"I like your ideas," Lord Melville grudginly admitted, "but I have hired an expensive building company."

"Will they do as good a job as I can?" Matthew said. "Or will it cost you more in the end?"

Lord Melville laughed again. "You are persistent, but I like that in a man. Maybe the expense will be worth it. At least Jo Anna will speak to me again. Yes, I will hire you and make Fairfield House the way it was for my ancestors, who are probably haunting this place."

"You won't regret it," Matthew said, gripping Lord Melville's hand. ""My wife is having a birthday supper tomorrow evening. I hope you will join us and I'll have the contract ready to sign."

"You don't waste time, do you," Lord Melville replied, smiling broadly. "Yes, I'll come with Jo Anna and Franklin."

"Tomorrow night, then."

"Yes, tomorrow."

Something special was happening in the garden and Sarah was excited. The garden was trimmed to its best appearance, the roses in full bloom and the sculptured bushes in perfect shape. Two silk canopies were being erected and Sarah watched with delight as they fluttered in the gentle breeze, colourful, covering the lush grass. The

weather co-operated with weak sunshine instead of showers. Tonight was Nan's birthday supper, a celebration for friends and family.

Sarah sat beneath the canopy, dreaming. Her five year old imagination carried her away to strange lands where this silk had come from. Nanny Jane discovered her and scolded her for getting in the way of the servants preparing the tables. She pulled her away and Sarah resisted but was forced inside for her evening meal. This was a party for adults.

Sarah waited and waited but it was a long time before her parents came in to say goodnight. Nan's hair was piled high upon her head, a thin rope of pearls decorated the peak. A low-necked green satin dress billowed over a wide hoop swallowing up Nan's tiny figure. Sparkling diamonds dangled from Nan's dainty ears and she did not wear the matching necklace, leaving her creamy-skinned throat bare. Sarah was afraid to hug her in case she smudged some of her supper on the dress.

"It's alright, darling," Nan said, as she sat on the edge of the bed and hugged her daughter.

"Mamma, you're beautiful," Sarah said, sniffing the delicate rose water her mother always wore.

"And what about me?" Matthew teased awaiting his daughter's approval.

Sarah stared at her father and giggled behind her hands. She had never seen her father in anything but his work clothes. Tonight he was dressed in a patterned brocade jacket over a frilly white shirt. He wore white knee breeches , wine coloured stockings with gold buckle shoes on his feet. Matthew's hair was pulled back and tied neatly with a small black bow. He adamantly refused to wear a wig or powder his hair as was the style of the day.

"It's that bad, is it?" Matthew laughed, tickling his giggling daughter. "Oh well, just for a few hours then I can put this away for

another year. Now off to bed and we'll tell you all about the supper in the morning."

Reluctantly Sarah climbed between the fresh sheets and closed her eyes. Sleep would not come. Then music and noise drifted up from the garden, dragging Sarah out of bed. Pushing a chair to the window she climbed up on it and looked out at the party.

Lanterns hung around the canopies giving the garden a look of fairyland. Ladies and gentlemen, all shapes, sizes and wearing brilliant colours, were laughing and talking while eating from the lavish banquet meal. Musicians were playing the popular music of the day, and several couples were dancing. Sarah wanted to be part of this magic.

Nanny Jane was in the kitchen helping the cook and did not see a tiny shadow creep past the window. Sarah knew exactly where to hide. She crawled beneath one of the sculptured bushes where she could not be seen but could see everything that was happening. Then a man and a woman sat down on the marble bench next to Sarah's bush. Behind a fluttering fan the man and woman indulged in a flirtatious kiss. Suddenly the woman saw a pair of eyes staring at her from under the bush.

"There's an animal under that bush," the woman screamed and quickly jumped up.

Servants grabbed a lantern and rushed to the bench vacated by the man and woman. A frightened face stared back at the servant holding the lantern and he laughed when he saw what it was. Matthew hurried over and when he saw Sarah, he laughed and pulled her up into his arms. She was dirty and had some of the tiny leaves stuck in her hair.

"I've heard about your strange daughter," said the man who had been sitting on the bench, and the woman who had been with him tittered with amusement.

Other guests laughed amongst themselves at the incident and stared at Sarah. She didn't cry but was upset that these strangers

were laughing at her when all she wanted to do was to join the party. Nanny Jane had been called from the kitchen and in her usual disapproving manner, took Sarah into her arms and carried her back to bed.

"Be a good girl and stay in bed," Nan laughed kissing her untidy daughter. "Soon you'll be old enough to join us."

Nanny Jane washed the dirt off Sarah and dressed her in a clean nightgown. She put her back in bed and sternly admonished her not to leave it until morning. Then Nanny Jane went back to the kitchen. Sleep still didn't come but this time the music was drowned out by the sounds of laughter echoing in Sarah's ears. She was very lonely and there was no one to comfort her, no one to soothe her embarrassment at being found. Once again Sarah climbed out of bed but this time it was not to watch the party frolics.

Creeping down the back stairs Sarah went out into the darkness of the garden where the light from the canopy lanterns did not reach. She was afraid of the dark and hurried toward the stables where lanterns were lit for the guests to leave their horses. Sarah looked for Harry but she could not find him. At last, exhausted she crept into Beauty's stall.

The horse sensed the child's need and let Sarah lean against her and cry. Then Beauty lay down in her stall, very still, as Sarah slept beside her.

Five

Nan rose from the chair and walked slowly into the shadows of the garden to hide from everyone how ill she was feeling, especially from JoAnna DeAstor who was looking for her. She sat down on a shadowed bench between some fragrant bushes to hide from Jo Anna. She did not want a strained conversation with her.

Flickering light from the colourful chinese lanterns illuminated couples still dancing beneath the canopy to the minuet music played by four violins. A clear sky glittering with stars shone down on the couples strolling through the lighted garden. Nan sat in a chair near the table, which had been laden with food, and was constantly being replenished by the servants. She had been dancing with Matthew, Franklyn DeAstor and many others who came to celebrate her birthday.

"Oh, there you are," Jo Anna gushed. "Are you tired already?"

"A little," Nan replied, hoping that Jo Anna didn't intend to stay chatting. Jo Anna sat down beside her and continued talking.

"This is a great dinner," Jo Anna said. "Too bad you had to hold it in the garden. You could have had it in our great hall. Then we could have danced all night. It's starting to feel cool, and the guests will be leaving soon. Why doesn't Matthew build you a bigger house with a great hall so you can hold more parties?"

"I like this garden, and I don't want a bigger house. Matthew is too busy to build something we don't need."

"He'll be busier than ever now," Jo Anna sighed, "now that he's going to rebuild Fairfield House. Matthew has really been successful these last few years. At last, he's getting to fulfil his dream."

"Yes," thought Nan, feeling jealous, "you have always shared that dream with him."

JoAnna's thoughts drifted back to earlier years. She and Matthew had grown up together but in different worlds. Matthew was the son of a field worker and she the daughter of a wealthy lord. Matthew often worked with his father but when he was twelve years old an edition was built on Jo Anna's house. He was asked to help the builders. Jo Anna noticed the attractive young man and was curious about him. She had strolled through the garden to watch the builders, and to get a closer look at the young man.

Matthew knew who she was and had often seen her travelling with her parents in their carriage. She never acknowledged him as the carriage passed, nor saw him working in the gardens. Today, she paused near him and he looked up at her and smiled. Jo Anna was captivated and lingered near the building site until she was almost knocked over by a cart filled with stone blocks.

"Look out, miss!" Matthew shouted and Jo Anna stepped out of the way of the lumbering horse.

"Thank you," she replied brushing away an unseen spot of dust from the bodice of her dress. At eleven years old, Jo Anna already knew what attracted a young man.

Matthew smiled again. "Excuse me, miss." I have to get back to work."

"Jo Anna," her father called running breathlessly up to her, "you could have been hurt by that cart. Come away."

"Yes, Father." Jo Anna smiled at Matthew and followed her father to a safer part of the garden for her afternoon stroll. In the following days and weeks while the building continued, Jo Anna made it a point to saunter past Matthew who smiled at her. After the working hours of the day Matthew often walked by the nearby creek One time Jo Anna was there and he knew it wasn't by accident. They became friends but Matthew knew he could never think of obtaining

anything more than friendship between them. She was the Lord's daughter and he one of his servants.

Sometimes Matthew's walks took him past the crumbling remains of Fairfield House. By this time he was working with the builders and wondering what could be done with this once gracious house. Over time he dreamed of what he could do to the house, wandered through the empty rooms and drew up plans. These he showed to the builders he was working with and they taught him how to do architectural drawings to scale. These he shared with Jo Anna and she influenced her father to send him to school to become a builder and designer. Matthew's family didn't understand his ambition to be more than his father. Jo Anna became his confidant and he shared all his dreams with her.

Jo Anna was sent away to a finishing school for young ladies and Matthew went to school for architecture. While he was in training, he met a young lady named Nan, and they were married. When Jo Anna returned she was disappointed to learn of his marriage but knew at this point in time, she could never have married him. From her own social circle she married Franklyn DeAstor.

Jo Anna looked into the garden and smiled as she thought of how jealous Nan must be at the thought of her sharing Matthew's dreams. She hoped that their marriage was not as happy as it seemed. Her own marriage was one of convenience, and she had taken several lovers. Now that Matthew was rebuilding Fairfield House for Lord Melville, one of her previous lovers, he would spend a lot of time at her home, Ashton Hall. Lord Melville must be made to stay there until Fairfield House was completed.

"Oh," Nan moaned as a searing pain coursed through her.

"Are you alright?" Jo Anna inquired, looking at her.

"No. Please help me into the house and up to my bedroom." Another knife-hot pain tore through her as she got up from the bench and leaned against Jo Anna.

"Was it something you ate?" Jo Anna asked as they walked slowly across the fieldstone pathway.

"No!" Nan gasped feeling moisture between her legs. "I'm losing a baby again."

"I'll get you inside then find Matthew."

"No," Nan begged. "He doesn't know I'm pregnant. I didn't want to disappoint him again in case something like this happened. Just help me inside and find my maid Susannah."

Nan had another miscarriage watched helplessly by her maid and Jo Anna. She was very pale and very ill. Jo Anna stayed while the maid helped Nan into a clean nightdress. The remains of the three month fetus had already been disposed of by the doctor that Susannah had called, who gave Nan instructions to rest and get strong. The doctor told her she could have more children and not to mourn for this lost child.

"Shall I ask your husband to come and tell him about the miscarriage?" the doctor enquired.

"No, I'll tell him later. He's with Lord Melville discussing business."

Nan was depressed at the sight of healthy Jo Anna. At this moment, in her jealousy, she hated her more than ever. Jo Anna had thick, dark hair piled high on her proud head, sparkling, costly diamonds intertwined with the curls. A full bosom was barely covered by the bodice of her sleeveless, white brocade dress. She wore white, elbow-length gloves and diamond bracelets at her wrists. From their first meeting there had been animosity between them, Nan, the wife of the man Jo Anna couldn't have.

"If I die," Nan cried silently to herself, "Matthew will go to her. He's in her social circle now. It will be easy to get rid of her husband. Poor Sarah."

Matthew and Lord Melville were in his office going over the drawings for Fairfield House. The contract between them had taken many hours to agree upon, and neither of them had stayed long at the birthday supper. Lord Melville liked to get his way but Matthew was insistent on how Fairfield House should be restored. The discussion and arguments continued until fingers of sunlight touched the early morning sky. Finally, the two exhausted men agreed on the design.

"You're a hard man, Purcell," Lord Melville laughed.

"You too," Matthew replied, smiling.

The two men shook hands to seal their business agreement and the beginning of a friendship.

A weary Lord Melville walked to the stables for his carriage. Jo Anna and Franklyn had come in their own and had left the party hours ago. As he entered the stables the servants were cleaning up after the horses and they bid him good morning. Passing a stall, he saw one of the horses lying down. Fearing that the horse was ill he looked into the stall. He laughed at what he saw. Sarah was curled up in the straw fast asleep, her head against the horse.

Harry had seen Lord Melville enter the stables and was leading a horse to hitch up to his carriage. Lord Melville, still smiling, approached him.

"Come with me, lad," he said, and Harry followed him to Beauty's stall.

"Miss Sarah! Harry cried. "What's she doing here?"

"She wanted to join the party last night, and was found hiding under a bush."

"She was!" Harry gasped, then he chuckled. "That's Miss Sarah. She has a mind of her own and wants what she wants. Come on, Beauty, get up now."

The horse didn't move. Sarah heard voices, and opened her eyes. She saw Harry.

"I couldn't find you," she said sleepily rubbing her eyes.

"Well, it's time you went back to your bed young lady," Lord Melville said softly, "before anyone finds out you're missing. Especially your Nanny."

At the mention of Nanny Jane, Sarah looked worried. She got up on her feet, then threw her arms around Beauty, who was still lying down.

"I love you, Beauty," Sarah said kissing her broad nose.

Harry opened the stall door and Sarah walked out as Beauty snorted and stood up. Sarah was covered in bits of straw and began brushing them off.

"You'd better let me take you back to the house," Lord Melville said, smiling down at her.

Sarah hesitated, looked at Harry, then at Lord Melville. "It's alright, Miss Sarah," Harry said. "He's a friend of your father."

"How about a ride on my shoulders," Lord Melville said, thinking of all his nieces and nephews who loved to be carried that way.

Sarah shook her head as she walked along the cold ground. "I'd rather be carried."

"Agreed," Lord Melville answered, and picked her up in his arms.

The house servants were up clearing the remains of last night's party. Lord Melville carried the sleepy Sarah past their surprised faces, and cautioned them not to tell what they had seen. They told him where the nursery was and he crept past the sleeping Nanny Jane.

"I like you," Sarah said, as she snuggled into her warm bed.

"Then you can call me Uncle Byron."

"Good night, Uncle Byron."

"Good night, Miss Sarah, although it's morning."

Lord Melville stared down at the beautiful child who had quickly fallen back to sleep. For a moment he wished he had a

spunky daughter like her but thoughts of dominating women pushed this thought away. He was glad of his bachelorhood.

When Nanny Jane woke several hours later she could not understand how being put to bed clean, Sarah could wake up so dirty. In the following months Nanny Jane could not understand, nor could Sarah's mother and father, how she had come to call Lord Melville, Uncle Byron. That was their secret and neither one of them explained the reason of how they had met.

As the morning light grew brighter, Matthew climbed the stairs to his room. The maid, Susannah, stopped him her face worried, with dark shadows under her eyes.

"Susannah, is something wrong with Nan?"

"Mistress Nan is very ill, sir."

Matthew pushed past her and hurried into Nan's room. She was sleeping and he sat on the edge of her bed. He touched her face and she opened her eyes, and looked up at him. Her forehead was warm and her eyes glazed with pain.

"I'm sorry, Matthew. I lost another child."

"I told you, no more children, after the last miscarriage."

"I know, but I want to give you a son."

"No more, Nan. No more! I can't lose you. What good is a son if I have to lose you?"

"The doctor said I can have more children. I want more, Matthew."

"Sarah is all we need. She's better than any son."

"When I am better we'll talk about this. I'm too tired now. Let me sleep."

"Darling, sleep well. I can't lose you."

Six

At eight years old Sarah was allowed out on her own as long as she was only going to Uncle Byron's. Her walks took her along the banks of the River Wye, behind Fairfield House. The high riverbanks led down to a reedy shore and was a favourite haunt of birds. Sarah left home wearing a freshly cleaned dress and clean shoes. When she arrived for her visit her dress was covered with grass stains and her shoes were most often wet or muddy. Her hands and face were dirty and her hair was often decorated with bits of grass and twigs. Sarah loved to lie in the grass, motionless, and watch the birds flit over the river catching invisible bugs, or dip down to the water for a quick drink. The birds got used to the human intruder and accepted that she was no threat to their safety. Sometimes Sarah lay in the damp grass just above the river so she could get closer to the birds.

On early morning walks to visit Uncle Byron, if Sarah lay very quiet in the grass by the river's edge, she saw a heron walk slowly through the reeds in search of his breakfast. One tiny rustle and the heron spread its massive wings and flew across the river. At other times as Sarah lay watching quietly in the grass, a kingfisher darted down to the rippling waves and grabbed a struggling fish for its meal. Ducks often swam past her showing off their new babies that floated between the proud parents. Red breasted robins darted along the muddy shoreline always locating a delectable worm. Seagulls squawked as they circled in the air searching for food. Sarah never tired of watching the birds on their daily routine.

Matthew rebuilt Fairfield House to its former magnificent splendor and added new rooms to one side. Around it flowed a garden filled with flowers and shrubs for every season. Lord Melville was pleased with the tower room that became his library and sanctuary away from his visiting relatives and other guests. He spent many hours in the open parapet viewing his property and finally understood why Matthew had insisted that the tower room be restored. During the three years of construction Matthew and Byron Melville became good friends. A frequent visitor that Byron allowed into his sanctuary, was Sarah.

Uncle Byron could not say no to anything Sarah asked of him, including entry to his tower room. He often read to her from his books and showed her the illustrations. Often she chose her own book, sat on the cushioned window seat, pretended to read but spent time looking at the drawings.

On a warm, spring morning Sarah walked along the river path to visit Uncle Byron. She was shocked to see someone sitting in her favourite place, a young man. He held a paintbrush and she watched as he dipped it into a pallet of colours. An easel held a large canvas, half completed, accurately capturing the picturesque River Wye. She watched him apply the colour to his canvas and add another feature of the river.

Cautiously, quietly Sarah advanced on the artist. A rustle of grass disturbed his concentration and he turned toward the sound. He was surprised to see a little girl, with twigs and grass caught in her hair. They stared at each other then Richard Beacon smiled. As usual Sarah's dress had grass stains and bits of mud. The lace at the bottom of her dress was torn and dragged behind her. He had never seen a young girl in such an untidy mess, and thought she must be the daughter of a servant.

"Where did you come from, little urchin?" Richard teased, laughing.

"You're in my spot!" Sarah replied, her shyness overcome by anger.

"I'm so sorry, Ma'am," Richard taunted, then bowed with a flourish. "If I had known this was your ladyship's place, I would not have settled here."

His teasing and laughter made Sarah feel uncomfortable remembering the last time she had been laughed at. She stared at the ground, and kicked at the grass. Richard chuckled and wondered if he could add her to his painting. Sarah did not move from her spot, and he decided he must make her a friend if he was to continue with his painting.

"What do you think of my painting?" he asked as he turned his back toward her and added a delicate stroke of green to his canvas.

Sarah did not answer but curiosity made her look up. She noticed how well he had painted the river on his canvas, so much like her favourite spot. But something was missing – there were no birds! For a moment she said nothing, then she felt angry. How could he ignore the birds that loved the river.

"You haven't put the birds in your picture," Sarah said shyly, glancing at the artist, then back at the ground.

"There aren't any birds here," was his reply.

"Yes, there are, but you've chased them all away. They don't come when other people are around. They only let me watch them."

"Well then, I can't put them into my painting."

"Maybe if you're quiet and lie down in the grass, they'll come back."

"I can't wait that long because the light will change. Why don't you draw me a picture of your birds?"

Richard handed Sarah a small pad already half-filled with his pencil sketches. At first she refused to look up or take the pad. Then her hands reached out and took the pad and pencil.

"Sit down and draw me a bird," Richard said, "while I finish getting the correct colour of this light on my canvas. I can always add the bird later on."

Sarah sat down on the grass, with the pad in her lap and the pencil between her fingers. She watched the artist make tiny marks on his canvas, slowly building a line of grass against the river, shadowed by the trees on each side. The delicate leaves seemed to move as if a breeze was blowing. Richard's brush touched one colour then dabbed at his pallet mixing several colours together. A new shade was created and Sarah was fascinated. Maybe if she drew a bird he would let her use his paints.

Sarah's first attempt at drawing a bird did not match the vision she had in her head. She became frustrated and redrew the bird. Still not satisfied, she drew another until the page was covered with her efforts.

"Can I use another page?" Sarah asked timidly

"Of course," Richard replied and Sarah flipped the page.

This time, before Sarah began her drawing, she thought hard about the Barn Swallow she wanted to draw. She could see its rounded, deep blue head with a sharp beak, the long, very thin divided tail, its colourful tawny orange brown on the throat, and tawny orange breast. Sarah knew the layering of its feathers, the wrinkles on its feet and the touch of orange on its wings. She loved the splash of white on the underside of its tail. Often she and Harry sat in the stables watching these birds flit around the rafters. Sarah knew every detail but could she draw it onto this paper?

Sarah's clenched fingers moved the pencil across the paper and drew a rough outline of the Barn Swallow. She drew its feet with sharp claws and beak, drew its long tail and darkened its wings. She left blank the areas of the bird which were orange, and white then put the pencil on her lap. It almost looked like what she had imagined. Richard finished as much of his painting as he could and watched Sarah's concentration.

"That's very good," he said looking down at her drawing.

"Can I use your colours?" Sarah asked, the picture of the Barn Swallow still fresh in her mind.

Richard hesitated wondering how Lord Melville would feel about his sharing the expensive paints he'd purchased for him with a child. Then the pleading look on Sarah's face made him give into her. He handed her a fresh brush and showed Sarah how to moisten the tip, then dip it into the water paints.

Sarah's face lit up with joy and she smiled at Richard. He was amazed at how beautiful she was for a dirty urchin and wondered again who she was. Sarah painstakingly transferred the paint to her drawing and concentrated on putting the right colour where it should be. She found it hard to get the exact colour that was in her mind for the bird's throat and breast. She sighed in frustration and used the colour she had mixed but t was not the right colour.

"That's not right but I don't know how to mix the colours properly."

Richard recognized the Barn Swallow in spite of the incorrect colour and was surprised at how well she had drawn it.

"Did someone teach you how to draw birds?"

"I imagined it in my head and drew it. Is it good?"

"You just imagined it and drew it! Yes, it is good. Well, I think someone should teach you how to draw and paint."

Sarah looked down at her drawing and smiled happily. Carefully she tore the page off the pad and held it in her hands. It almost looked like the Barn Swallow. She must show it to Harry.

Richard wondered where a servant's child could learn to draw and paint. He couldn't afford to teach her without payment as he was still a student sponsored by Lord Melville. He looked up as footsteps sounded on the path, and Lord Melville approached.

"Ah, I see you've met my Sarah," Lord Melville said, "I wondered why she hadn't come to visit me. Sarah, Harry's been sent to find you."

"Uncle Byron, look at my picture," Sarah cried thrusting the picture at him. "I drew a bird!"

"Well, look at that," Lord Melville replied, while Richard looked on, speechless. "All by yourself!"

"No one helped me, but he let me use his paint."

Lord Byron looked at Richard who nodded in assent that yes, Sarah had done it by herself.

"She should have some lessons," Richard said to him.

"Would you like to learn how to draw, Sarah?" Lord Melville asked.

"Oh yes, Uncle Byron. Can I. I want to draw a better bird and get the colour right."

"Of course, my dear. I'll speak to your father and perhaps Richard here can be your teacher. Would you like that?"

"He let me use his paper, and was very nice, but he called me an urchin."

Lord Melville laughed and Richard blushed red. "Run off home with Harry and show him what you did."

Richard packed up his paints, his canvas and his easel after Sarah left with Harry who had followed Lord Melville along the path. Lord Melville told him about Sarah and her father who had rebuilt Fairfield House for him.

"There's been an accident, Richard," Lord Melville said sadly. "Franklyn DeAstor's horse jumped over a low fence and into a groundhog hole. His neck was broken and he died without regaining consciousness."

"How is JoAnna?"

"Shaken up by his death but seems to be coping well. It was never a love match."

During the three years of rebuilding Fairfield House, Matthew was often with Lord Melville. JoAnna was, intentionally, always

near by. During this time Nan was afraid that Matthew would become JoAnna's lover but he always denied that this would happen. Still, she was afraid every time he had to talk to Lord Melville. With her past pregnancy Nan had hoped she could produce a son so Matthew would never leave her for JoAnna. Now JoAnna was a young, beautiful widow. When the servants told her what had happened to Franklyn DeAstor, Nan was more frightened than ever. JoAnna needed a man, and Matthew was her very close friend.

Seven

Matthew felt it was his duty as a close friend, to comfort JoAnna. He had made the funeral arrangements for Franklyn DeAstor and the transportation of his body to France for burial in his mother's family plot. He arranged for the closing of JoAnna's home and she was now staying in his home until she decided whether to go with the coffin and visit her husband's family. During this time Sarah grew to hate her. Too often Sarah saw her father holding a sobbing JoAnna in his arms.

"Aunt JoAnna is very unhappy," Matthew said to his stern-faced, young daughter. "She needs someone to comfort her."

"Then why doesn't Uncle Byron hug her, too?" Sarah asked, staring coldly at JoAnna who continued to sniffle into her lace handkerchief.

"I'm sure he does." Matthew laughed, both at the comment and his daughter's jealousy.

"Well, you don't have to hug her so much," Sarah replied with her eight-year old wisdom. "Mamma doesn't like it either."

JoAnna hid her smiling face behind her handkerchief. Nan showed her dislike of JoAnna by not sympathizing with her many tearful complaints about being a widow and was jealous of Matthew comforting her too often. The servants treated Joanna with disdain by refusing to serve her unless Matthew ordered them to. Nan had spoken to him about making Joanna go to France but he refused to push her into a hasty decision.

One day when they were writing letters in the sitting room Nan said to Joanna, "Why don't you go to France and let Franklyn's family comfort you."

"I don't know them, and Matthew is such a good comforter," JoAnna replied, between tears that she could make flow when she needed them.

"Well, it would be better for you if you went to France."

"I like it right here where all my friends are," JoAnna replied, sniffling into her handkerchief. She loved baiting Nan.

Nan frowned more often these days, especially when JoAnna sobbed in Matthew's arms. JoAnna had a special bond with Matthew that Nan couldn't seem to break after twelve years of marriage. JoAnna often reminded Nan that she had known Matthew much longer than her.

After seeing Sarah's jealousy, Matthew comforted Joanna less often. He also noticed Nan's worried face and began to see his actions through her eyes. He urged JoAnna to accept the offer of a visit to France. She persisted that she didn't want to go, but after seeing there was no hope of taking Matthew away from his wife, decided to go. JoAnna stayed in France for two years.

Sarah was pleased that JoAnna had finally left and her life resumed its usual pattern of visits to Uncle Byron and the river to watch the birds. Matthew hired a tutor and Sarah spent her mornings studying with him. The tutor taught her reading, history, calculations, and drawing. Drawing included water colour paints and the proper mixing of them. Sarah spent more time on her drawing than the other lessons. Nanny Jane was responsible for schooling her in manners and how a young girl should act. Sarah always ignored these lessons much to Nanny Jane's frustration. She liked Nanny Jane in spite of her strict attitude and Nanny Jane secretly admired Sarah for doing exactly what she wanted. Often Nanny Jane sighed at the freedom Sarah had, that she herself could not have.

On summer afternoons, if the weather was not too warm and sunny, Sarah took her sketch pad to the pond, or to the river to draw

her favourite birds. Most often she lay very still on her stomach in the grass while soaring above her, around her and sometimes coming very close, were the birds she loved.

She watched seagulls in their white and gray finery dropping swiftly to the water to catch the tiny fish. Often the gulls ventured near her looking for a bit of bread. Their hooked bills opened and closed in orchestrated, noisy cries as Sarah studied the intricate layering of feathers. Soon she was able to distinguish the young ones from their parents, detailing in her drawing, their juvenile colours.

A long-legged heron, standing on one leg in the reedy shallows, seemed oblivious to the silent figure of Sarah lying in the grass. On her pad she drew the intricate details of the majestic bird with its snake-like neck and sharp, spear-like beak that captured unwary fish. The heron was a good model for Sarah, as it stood absolutely still in the water until she finished her sketching.

Sometimes the artist, Richard, who continued to live with Lord Melville, joined Sarah beside the river. Often he quietly pointed out to Sarah a detail that she had missed. He laughed at Sarah's frustrations when her fingers could not transfer the picture in her mind onto paper.

"Well, that's not how the falcon looks!" Sarah shouted at him, then ripped the page out of her sketch pad and tore it to pieces. "The feathers are longer on his legs. Then I can't draw the legs right!"

"You can't expect to be perfect when you are just learning," Richard soothed, but could not persuade Sarah to stop feeling so frustrated.

"But I know what I want to draw," Sarah cried, ignoring his words. "Why won't it come out properly?"

"You are doing excellent work for a nine year old girl."

"I want to draw it right!"

"Someday, you'll be the most famous bird artist in the world."

"Not with drawings like these," Sarah replied, angrily tossing the bits of paper into the grass.

On other days Sarah was very pleased with her bird drawings, although she knew they were still far from perfect. Richard's paintings often showed Sarah's influence on him when he included small birds in his landscapes of the river.

On rainy afternoons, Sarah spent her afternoons sketching in the stable. Her friend Harry still cared for the injured birds Sarah brought to him, and these birds were models for her sketches.

"See this extra bit of feather," Harry said and pointed out something Sarah had overlooked. She gently ruffled the bird's feathers on its back to study how they were layered.

"How soft they are," Sarah whispered as she fingered the downy covering on an injured sparrow's belly. The tiny bird lay quiet and calm in Sarah's hands, as if it knew she was a friend and had nothing to fear.

"Look at how the feathers spread when the bird is flying," Harry said, pointing to the barn birds as they flew from rafter to rafter.

"They fold back so neatly." Sarah tried to record the intricate feather arrangements on paper.

Sarah's days were very full and happy and she spent very little time with her parents. In the second year of JoAnna's absence, Sarah did not notice how ill her mother was, pregnant again. Nan was always cheerful when Sarah was with her, hiding her pain, focused on what she had drawn. It became a joyous ritual for Sarah and her mother, as they read together each evening. Nan helped her read the difficult words. Towards the end of Nan's eighth month of pregnancy, Sarah realized that her mother was in bed instead of sitting up in her chair.

"Are you not feeling well, Mamma?" a worried Sarah asked.

"A little, but only because you will soon have a baby brother."

"I will!" Sarah wasn't sure if she wanted a brother. "You won't be ill like last time!"

"I don't think so." Nan smiled at her worried daughter who looked healthy and beautiful. "Come and sit on the bed with me."

Sarah climbed up beside her mother and Nan put her arms around her. Sarah leaned against her mother and felt how thin she had become while her stomach was a small mound beneath the covers. Why did she need a brother?

Sarah spent more time with her mother and sometimes her father joined them. They talked of the many things they would do after the baby was born, picnics, carriage rides, to show off the new Purcell. However, Sarah noticed the strange glances between her parents, the dark shadows under her mother's eyes and the worried frowns from her father.

Late one night Sarah awoke to the sound of hurried feet running down the corridor. Nanny Jane also awoke, and Sarah saw the fear written on her face.

"Go back to sleep, Sarah," Nanny Jane ordered and Sarah obediently closed her eyes, but did not sleep.

Nanny Jane left the nursery and Sarah tiptoed out of bed. She tried to open the door to her mother's room but found it locked. She wondered where her father was and opened the door of her room. The hallway was empty and the candle had burned low leaving dark shadows along the walls. Sarah crept through the shadows down to her father's office.

Matthew sat in his chair, his body rigid and a glass of brandy in his shaking hands. A warm fire burned in the fireplace, but it could not penetrate the cold fear he felt. Sarah quietly stepped into the room and he did not hear her. She suddenly felt very frightened.

"Papa," Sarah said, putting her hand on his shoulder.

Matthew was torn from his deep thoughts, the liquid in the glass splashing a few drops onto his hands.

"Papa, what's wrong?"

"What are you doing up, young lady?" Matthew's voice quivered. He tried to be stern, but failed.

"I couldn't sleep," Sarah said. "There was too much noise in the hallway. Is Mamma all right?"

"Of course, your Mamma's fine," Matthew replied, not looking at his daughter. "She's just fine."

Sarah did not believe him as his voice did not sound convincing. She began to cry and Matthew pulled her onto his lap and hugged her tightly, his face buried in her tangled curls.

"She'll be all right," he said without conviction.

Sarah soon fell asleep in her father's arms. Matthew continued to hug her tightly, and cursed himself for the child that struggled in his wife's womb. He should have listened to himself and kept away from her, but she wanted a son for him and he also wanted that son. Would she deliver the child alive? Would she live to see it grow? When his second daughter was born Matthew still sat in his office, Sarah on his lap as they both slept in troubled sleep.

A servant tapped on the door of Matthew's office, her face wet with tears. Matthew jerked awake and tried not to wake Sarah. Gently he cradled her in his arms, got up then lowered Sarah down onto the chair. The servant's tears told him the devastating news.

"The child is well but Nan has died," the servant said, as Matthew clung to his desk to keep from collapsing.

Sarah heard the servant and opened her eyes. She saw the white face of her father as he stared blankly at her.

"Papa, have I got a new brother?" Matthew did not answer her. Sarah slid out of the chair and put her arms around him. "Papa, is Mamma all right?"

Nanny Jane appeared in the doorway and hesitated as she saw Sarah clinging to her father. She entered the office and touched the top of Sarah's shaking head.

"Come, Sarah," Nanny Jane said, "leave your father alone for awhile."

"I want to see Mamma!"

"You can't see her."

"Is she dead?"

Nanny Jane didn't answer, but tears fell from her eyes. Sarah let go of her father and began screaming. "I want my mother! I want my mother!"

"Hush, child." Nanny Jane pulled the sobbing Sarah into her arms. "Come back to bed, there's nothing you can do for your mother now."

Sarah did not get the promised brother and she also lost her beloved mother.

Eight

Matthew felt as if his heart had been torn out. In its place excruciating pain knifed through him and impeded the flow of cleansing tears. Emptiness severed all emotions as he sat on the hard wooden bench in the church while the minister droned on about the loss of Nan, wife and mother. Servants and friends cried openly at the minister's words as they wished they could stem the pain inside Matthew. Sarah cried silently as she leaned against Lord Melville. She couldn't look at the closed casket at the front of the church . JoAnna DeAstor was still in France.

At the conclusion of the burial service the pall bearers carried the casket out to the church's cemetery and lowered it into the hole. Several of his friends supported Matthew on each side as he was incapable of walking on his own. He stared into the hole as the casket was lowered and tried to touch the casket. His friends gripped his shoulders and arms so he wouldn't fall on top of it. Sarah stood at the edge of the grave and clung to Lord Melville's hand. Tears dried on her face. On her right cheek a smear of dirt showed where she had wiped tears away.

The minister read the final words of the funeral service then looked at the coffin and said, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Unto to thy Spirit we commend this soul. May the Lord have mercy on her a sinner. Amen."

"No!" Matthew lunged forward but was restrained by his friends as the minister threw a handful of soil onto the top of the casket.

Friends dragged Matthew away from the graveside. His eyes stared into space and he stumbled but did not fall. Sarah and Lord Melville walked slowly behind him and Sarah began crying again as she witnessed her father's behaviour. She felt frightened that he too would die.

"Why don't you come and stay with me?" Lord Melville whispered to Sarah as they walked to the carriage that would take them back to her home.

"I want to stay near my father," Sarah said, wiping the new tears from her face. "He needs me."

"All right, my dear. Remember I'm not far away if I can help you with him."

Matthew sat slumped in the carriage and Sarah climbed up beside him. She took his hand and squeezed it between her own. There was no reaction and she cuddled close to him. Lord Melville entered the carriage and sat across from them.

The carriage pulled into the driveway and stopped at the front door which was already open. Lord Melville stepped out of the carriage and helped Sarah down. Matthew didn't move. He continued to stare blankly at the floor of the carriage, his hands clenched together in agony.

"Come on, Matthew. We're home. Come in and have a brandy."

Matthew appeared not to hear him.

Lord Melville looked at the two men who had helped Matthew out of the church, and they approached the carriage. One of them grabbed Matthew's arms and pulled him out of the carriage. Between them they half-carried, half-dragged Matthew into the house. Sarah stared at her father, then raced into the house and up to the nursery. The mourners entered the house where food and drink were set out in the parlour.

Matthew's friends settled him into his usual chair. Lord Melville brought him a large glass of brandy. People walked up to him to

offer their condolences, but he did not acknowledge their presence. The glass almost slipped from Matthew's hand but Lord Melville grabbed it and put it against his lips. He forced him to take a sip and Matthew choked it down. This seemed to revive him a little and he quickly swallowed the brandy. Lord Melville filled another glass with brandy and Matthew drank it as quickly as the first.

"Help Matthew to his room," Lord Melville ordered one of the servants, then went upstairs with them.

Matthew was undressed by the servant and helped into bed where he lay in a stupor of brandy and anguish. He did not close his eyes but stared unseeing at the curtains surrounding his bed. Lord Melville sat beside the bed until finally Matthew closed his eyes and slept.

In the nursery, Sarah lay face down on her bed. She hid her face in a pillow but could not cry anymore. Nanny Jane stood and looked down at her but did not try to comfort her. She knew how much Sarah had loved her mother and that she could do nothing to help ease the loneliness.

"Do you want something to eat, Miss Sarah?" Nanny Jane asked touching Sarah's hand.

"Go away. I don't want to eat!" Sarah pulled her hand away and clutched the pillow tighter over her head.

"I asked cook to make your favourite pudding. Wouldn't you like some of that? It will make you feel better."

"I'm not hungry." Sarah cried into the pillow and it was soon wet with her tears.

Nanny Jane sat down on the bed beside Sarah. "You can't make your mother come back by not eating. She wouldn't want you to stop eating because she's not here."

"Why did she have to die?" Sarah sat up and looked at Nanny Jane. "I miss her!"

"We all do, Miss Sarah. Now come and have some pudding." Nanny Jane touched Sarah's tousled hair, and Sarah crumpled against her. Nanny Jane hugged Sarah closer as tears formed in her own eyes.

After Sarah ate her favourite custard pudding she fell asleep on the bed. Loud screams from her baby sister woke her up. Sarah sat up and ran to the large basket where the baby lay. She stood over the screaming baby as Nanny Jane entered the room carrying a bottle of warm milk. The red-faced child reminded Sarah of the baby birds she had found lost from their nest. She had taken these babies to Harry to look after. Sometimes they lived, but most times they died because they needed their parents to care for them. This baby had no mother, and a father that wouldn't care for her. The baby only had a sister, Sarah.

"Do you want to feed her?" Nanny Jane asked as she lifted the sniffling baby out of her bed. "Come, sit here in the rocking chair and you can feed her."

"She's awfully small!"

"If she keeps eating like she does, she won't be for long." Nanny Jane laughed as Sarah sat in the chair.

Gently the nameless child was lowered onto Sarah's lap. The child looked up at Sarah and began crying again until Nanny Jane showed how to fit the bottle's nipple into her mouth. The baby sucked hungrily at the flowing milk. Sarah sat still because she was afraid of dropping the child.

"I'll be your mother now," Sarah whispered to her sister and Nanny Jane smiled at the two motherless children.

"What will you call your sister?" Nanny Jane asked as she folded a clean baby napkin.

"Rose," Sarah replied after a few moments of thought. "Because Mama loved roses."

The bottle of milk was empty and Rose had almost fallen asleep. Nanny Jane showed Sarah how to pin on a dry napkin and then fixed it properly after her first attempt.

"Come, put her back into the bed as babies sleep a lot the first few months."

Sarah carried Rose in her arms just like Nanny Jane had shown her, then kissed the top of her fuzzy head, just like her mother often did to her. Gently she released Rose from her arms then lowered her into the warm wicker basket. Rose immediately fell asleep. Sarah arranged the covers around her sister then went back to her own bed. Some of the loneliness for her mother disappeared as she dreamed of the happy times she would have with her sister Rose.

Lord Melville decided that something had to be done. He wrote two letters, one to his favourite sister, and the other to JoAnna DeAstor in France. Within a month he had two guests staying with him, JoAnna until her own home, Ashton Hall, could be reopened and his niece Elizabeth Cantwell, who was three years younger than Sarah. JoAnna immediately visited Matthew to see for herself what Lord Melville had told her.

The servants refused to allow JoAnna to enter Matthew's study but she pushed past them and entered the room. She was shocked at his condition and realized that Lord Melville had not exaggerated. She found Matthew had lost a lot of weight and drank brandy all day rather than eat anything. His beard was unshaved, his eyes red and hollow, his clothes dishevelled, stained and smelled of spilled brandy. During the six months since the death of his wife he had sat in his study and had neglected all the building projects he'd been commissioned to do.

JoAnna slammed the door in the face of the staring servants and stood in front of Matthew. He held a glass in his hand and was raising it to his lips. She grabbed the glass and smashed it to the floor. Matthew jerked out of his stupor and stared at the angry woman in front of him.

"This won't help, Matthew," she shouted at him as he reached for the half-empty brandy bottle. "This won't bring her back!"

"Well, I intend to join her." Matthew breathed brandy fumes into her face as she bent over him.

"And what good will that do you?'

"I can't live without her," he said, leaning over his desk, resting his head on his arms.

"Of course you can. You have a daughter to look after, and a baby that Nan gave her life for. Wouldn't she be disappointed that you left them alone? Now, pull yourself together and I'll help you."

"JoAnna, JoAnna. I can't marry again."

"Am I asking you to? Now, get yourself cleaned up and get on with your life."

"What life is there without Nan?"

"You have a life in your children. Don't wallow in your pity and forget them. They need you."

"You're right of course, as always. I'll try."

"I'll be here to help you," JoAnna put her arms around him and leaned her face against the top of his head.

Sarah opened the door and stared at the sight of her father in JoAnna's arms. She ran in and tried to pull her away, but JoAnna held on. Matthew put an arm around Sarah and finally released the tears he had held back for so long.

"We don't need her here." Sarah glared at JoAnna.

"Just for awhile, Sarah, just for awhile."

Matthew stood up and leaned against JoAnna who helped him upstairs to his bed. His servant changed Matthew's clothes and helped him into bed, while JoAnna went downstairs to re-organize the servants who had been very lax about their duties. The servants hurried to do her bidding almost as if she was the new mistress of the house. Sarah ran outside into the garden. She felt upset that JoAnna had returned and taken over the care of her father, especially as she had not been able to help him over her mother's death.

Sarah dragged her feet along the pathway to her favourite spot by the river and lay still among the tall grass. She had not brought her drawing pad with her today, nor did she watch the birds flying around. She was too angry at JoAnna and disappointed that her father had allowed her to stay. A rustle in the grass disturbed her and she thought it was the artist, Richard.

"Go away," Sarah muttered without looking up to see who it was. "I don't want company."

"Hello," said a young girl. "Are you Sarah? Uncle Byron said you might be here."

Sarah turned in surprise to see, not Richard, but a young girl like herself. The girl carried a sketch pad in her hand.

"Is it all right if I stop here and draw the birds?" the girl asked. "Uncle Byron said this is the best spot to draw them."

"Who are you?" Sarah sat up to see her better.

"I'm Elizabeth Cantwell, and Lord Melville's my uncle."

"He's my uncle too," Sarah answered jealously. "But he's not really my uncle."

"He's my favourite uncle and he's told me a lot about you because he knows how much I like to draw and study birds."

"You do!" Elizabeth showed Sarah the pad of drawings. "They're good."

"Where are your drawings?" Elizabeth asked. Her uncle told her that Sarah had stopped drawing since the death of her mother.

"I haven't done any lately," Sarah said, staring at the bubbling river as she wished for her mother.

Elizabeth was silent, not knowing what to say. She wanted to be friends with this girl that also drew birds, this girl that her uncle was so proud of.

"Why don't you show me some that you've done before, then we can compare our drawings? Uncle Byron says that you're very good at drawing the birds."

"I don't care about drawing anymore." Sarah pouted. "So I won't show them to you."

A gust of wind blew tendrils of Elizabeth's hair around her face as she sat down beside Sarah. Her face, oval with long eyelashes above blue eyes, a delicate nose and mouth, stared at the unseeing Sarah. Then a twinkle brightened Elizabeth's face as she ignored Sarah and began sketching on her pad. At first Sarah refused to look at her, then sneaked glances at what Elizabeth drew. Pretending not to notice, Elizabeth continued sketching, but began to smile.

"There," Elizabeth said, holding her drawing out in front of her. "That looks good, don't you think so, Sarah?"

Sarah forgot that she was not interested in what Elizabeth drew, and eagerly scanned the picture.

"The woodpecker's feathers are tighter than what you've drawn."

"Show me what you mean," Elizabeth said, then handed the sketch pad to her.

Sarah added delicate details to the woodpecker that she thought was better than what Elizabeth had drawn.

"Do you want to see my drawings?" Sarah asked, then handed the sketch pad back.

"Oh yes," Elizabeth replied, then jumped up and closed the cover of her sketch pad. "Can we go and see them now?"

"Would you like to see my baby sister?"

"I'd love to. I don't have any brothers or sisters."

"You don't! Sarah said, feeling superior. "Since you're Uncle Byron's real niece, I'll share my sister with you."

The two girls smiled at each other and friendship blossomed between them. Sarah had never had a friend to share her love of birds with, except Harry and he never had much time to spend with her at the river. Arm in arm they walked, Sarah dark-haired and tall, Elizabeth smaller with sparkles of sunshine in her light brown hair.

Lord Melville watched them pass without the girls noticing him leaning against a tree. He was relieved that Sarah and Elizabeth had taken an immediate liking to each other. He hoped this would help Sarah through the loss of her mother.

Elizabeth and Sarah tiptoed into the nursery where Rose slept. When Rose awoke, she let Elizabeth hold her and feed her a little until her arms got tired and Nanny Jane took over. Then she and Sarah compared their drawings. Elizabeth's was done with bold, flowing strokes, Sarah's detailed and exact. Later Lord Melville came to get Elizabeth and seeing the two heads together over the drawings decided not to disturb them.

"I'll send Elizabeth's things here," he said to Nanny Jane. "She can stay with Sarah for awhile."

"It will be good for Miss Sarah to have a friend," Nanny Jane said. "Let her stay for as long as she can."

"That's why I invited Elizabeth to come. I knew they'd become friends."

Sarah began to draw her birds again as friendship grew between her and Elizabeth. Elizabeth also helped Sarah endure the next shock in her unsettled life.

Nine

"What are your parents like?" Sarah asked Elizabeth as they lay in her warm wide bed. A canopy stretched over their heads and curtains hung from the rods around the bed to keep out cold drafts. It was an intimate world for two young girls to indulge in fantasies and share secrets. Elizabeth did not answer but squirmed under the thick duvet as if she could not find a comfortable position.

Elizabeth replied in a quiet voice as she scrunched up the long sleeve of her nightgown. "I never knew my parents. I live with my aunt and uncle."

"You never knew your parents!" Sarah sat up and stared at the unhappy face of her new friend. "What happened?"

"My father was killed in a battle in a faraway country and my mother died when I was born."

"Then you're an orphan!"

"Yes," Elizabeth said, suddenly feeling the loss of the parents she had never known. Tears dripped from her eyes onto the pillow and she wiped them away.

Sarah stared at Elizabeth then lay down beside her. She touched Elizabeth's shoulder, and hugged her. She didn't know what to say to her, and wanted to talk about her own mother but was afraid it would make Elizabeth cry even more.

"Tell me about your mother," Elizabeth said, sensing that Sarah wanted to talk about her.

"She was really beautiful and she loved me. My mother was a lot of fun, but she was always sick. I would have had some brothers,

but they died when they were born. I wish they'd lived so my mother would have been happy. She was sad a lot but pretended not to be when I was around. She should have lived to take care of my sister. I miss her so much!"

"I wish I had a mother to miss. You must be very sad."

"At least I had her for awhile. Are your aunt and uncle good to you?"

"They love me like a real daughter," Elizabeth replied, drying her tears on the edge of the sheet. "Their own children never lived past being babies."

Sarah sat up again and Elizabeth thought she was upset because she missed her mother so much. Sarah was thinking of how she could help Elizabeth.

Excited at a sudden idea, Sarah said, "I've just thought of something. Rose and I will adopt you. You can be our sister!"

Elizabeth sat up and brushed the hair out of her eyes. She'd always wanted a brother or sister. Having two sisters would be just as nice.

"Could you do that, adopt me?"

"Yes, we can. We'll even have a secret ceremony and that will make you our sister."

"We should do it under a full moon," Elizabeth said, bouncing up and down. She and Sarah pulled open the curtains and left the warmth of the bed.

The air in the room was chilly and the two girls shivered as they stared out the window at the black night. The rain continued to beat against the windowpane in a somber symphony.

"Let's have a ceremony anyway," Elizabeth whispered, although no one in the house could hear them.

"Let's," Sarah said, as she agreed to the fascinating idea. She felt around beside her bed where a snuffed candle sat on a table. Sarah picked it up and stumbled through the dark to the fireplace

where a tiny spark flickered among the coals. The candlewick quickly caught the flame and a small circle of light fell over the faces of the two girls.

"We have to be very quiet," Sarah whispered as she opened the door to the nursery where Rose slept. "Nanny Jane hears everything."

The two girls crept silently up to the cradle where Rose slept. Sarah placed the candle on the floor so the light would not wake Nanny Jane who slept nearby. Each of them touched Rose and began giggling. This was fun.

"What will we say?" Sarah whispered.

"I know," Elizabeth whispered back. "We'll say what they do at a wedding."

"Have you been to a real wedding?"

On the nearby bed Nanny Jane turned over and muttered in her sleep. Sarah and Elizabeth knelt down behind the cradle's rockers and blew out the candle. They whispered softer to each other when they saw that Nanny Jane still slept.

"A cousin of mine," Elizabeth said into Sarah's ear. "I think they said to my cousin, 'do you take Bradley for your husband.' I'll say the words, 'Sarah and Rose, do you take Elizabeth to be your sister?"

Sarah giggled into her hand again. "Now what?" she said.

"You're supposed to say yes."

"Yes."

The two girls stood up slowly and touched Rose's hands. "Say yes for Rose too" Elizabeth said.

"Yes," Sarah said in a solemn voice.

"Now you have to say something," Sarah said, softly.

"I say, 'I Elizabeth, take Sarah and Rose as my sisters.' Now you kiss me on the cheek." Sarah gently kissed her on both cheeks as she had seen adults do when they were greeting each other.

"Now we're sisters." Elizabeth giggled. Hand in hand the two girls crept back through the dark to Sarah's bed. They hugged each

other and finally fell asleep. In the morning Nanny Jane couldn't understand why the candle was on the floor beside the cradle. She sighed uneasily about the two careless girls who could have caused a fire.

Matthew was sober, had shaved and changed his clothes for dinner. JoAnna and Lord Melville ate with him, both of them pleased to see Matthew looked healthier. JoAnna appeared even more beautiful, a young widow out of her mourning clothes. Lord Melville liked what he saw and wondered about ending his bachelorhood. However, he could see where her affection lay, in Matthew, who was now available. Matthew looked at JoAnna and longed for his beloved Nan. JoAnna read the painful emptiness written on his face. She wanted to erase that look, make him love her as much as he had loved Nan. This time JoAnna was staying in Matthew's house as her house was still closed up.

JoAnna's two years in France gave her much to talk about. She shared tidbits of gossip, humourous incidents and stories about the grand life she had lived. Matthew listened but he heard little of what she said. Lord Melville laughed at the appropriate places in JoAnna's tales, but he relished his quiet bachelor existence where his male friends discussed things of importance that women couldn't understand. He liked JoAnna but preferred his life without a woman demanding daily attention. By the end of the meal Matthew found himself enjoying JoAnna's stories and even laughed. JoAnna was pleased but she could see that it would be a very long time until Matthew lost the hollow feeling at the death of his wife, and could love someone else.

A month of serenity passed quickly for Sarah and Matthew. Neither saw much of the other, as JoAnna kept Matthew busy and Sarah spent most of her time with Elizabeth. JoAnna became part

of the social scene and dragged a reluctant Matthew with her. Sarah and Elizabeth shared their drawings and on fine days spent much of their time by the river. Then Matthew received a letter from Elizabeth's Aunt Alice. In the letter she told him how much they missed Elizabeth and wanted her home with them. Lord Melville was forced to take Elizabeth home.

"My aunt will help me write letters to you," Elizabeth promised, hugging her newfound sister Sarah.

"I'll write to you every day," Sarah promised in return, "and we'll see each other soon."

Elizabeth climbed into Lord Melville's carriage and waved a tear-wet handkerchief to Sarah while the matching brown horses pulled the carriage down the laneway. As the carriage drove out of sight, Sarah's loneliness for her mother returned. She ran toward the stables and a neglected Harry who she hadn't seen while Elizabeth visited.

Harry was busy, but Sarah's unhappy face made him stop his work. Whistling a merry tune he took down a cage containing a baby robin. He held it out to Sarah. She smiled as she took hold of the cage and the baby robin chirped at her. Some of her loneliness eased as she resumed her association with her birds.

Matthew looked up from his sketches and noticed Sarah standing in the doorway of his office. He suddenly realized how much he had missed his lively daughter.

"Come in, Sarah," he said smiling at her, and held out his arms. Sarah's tears fell silently as she ran to the comfort of her father's arms.

"I've missed you, Papa," Sarah cried, as she hid her face against his shoulder.

"And I've missed you," Matthew answered, kissing the top of her stable-smelling hair.

""I wish Mamma hadn't died." Sarah looked up at him. "I miss her a lot."

"So do I, Sarah. So do I."

There was silence between them as father and daughter shared their mutual pain. Then Matthew realized that he would always have Nan because of Sarah, their daughter. His pain almost disappeared as he hugged her close. Memory returned of the reason for Nan's death, the other child that was also part of her.

"The baby," Matthew asked, "is she well?"

"Oh yes," Sarah replied, smiling. "And I named her Rose."

"You did!" Matthew laughed. "Why did you call her that?"

"Because Mamma loved roses so much."

Here again was a connection with Nan, something she loved. As he looked at Sarah, Matthew could see Nan in her face. Someday she would probably look exactly like the cherished wife he remembered. He wondered what Baby Rose looked like.

"Can we go and see Rose?" Matthew asked, and Sarah nodded. She took hold of his hand as Matthew got up from his chair.

"She's probably sleeping, but you can look at her."

"Good, let's go see her."

JoAnna stood in the doorway. She had stood there unnoticed while Sarah and Matthew hugged each other. Jealousy filled her as she watched and she now tried to separate Matthew from Sarah.

"Matthew," JoAnna said sweetly in a honeyed voice. "There's an urgent matter I must speak to you about."

"It will have to wait until after I see my new daughter."

"It can't wait," JoAnna replied, laying her slim, well-cared for hand on his arm.

"We're going to see my sister," Sarah said. She did not like the hand on her father's arm, or the look passing between JoAnna and her father.

"It will have to keep," Matthew said, touching JoAnna, as he let go of Sarah's hand.

Sarah pulled on her father's arm, jerking his hand away from JoAnna's. "Come on, Papa."

"Then I'll wait until you return," JoAnna answered, her face angry, with a stern look upon Sarah. "I'll wait here for you. Don't be long."

Sarah held her father's hand as they walked up the staircase to the nursery. She looked back in triumph at Jo Anna who had not moved out of the doorway. Jo Anna stared back coldly at Sarah and began forming plans to get Matthew free of his daughter. Sarah smiled up at her father, unaware that soon their renewed closeness would be shattered.

Ten

Matthew opened the door to the nursery and stared at the breakfast table. There were two empty chairs and cereal bowls on the table. Then someone giggled from a hidden location and he stepped quietly into the room. Looking around the seemingly empty room Matthew tried to locate his missing daughters. There were toys neatly stored in shelves against the wall. Cloth dolls drooped from the top shelf low enough for a girl of almost ten to reach. Another giggle echoed and Matthew stepped toward the sound.

"Now, where could my daughters be?" He crossed the room and peered behind the large wooden toy box.

"I found you!" he cried. Sarah laughed as she crawled out of the small space behind the box, pulling Rose behind her. Rose clung to a piece of bread with jam and smeared traces of it across Sarah's face.

"You always find us," Sarah said as she smiled up at her father. She lifted Rose onto the chair at the table, and sat down in the other chair. Rose held out her sticky hand to her father and offered him a bit of her breakfast then ate it herself.

"You always hide in easy places."

"Nanny Jane," Matthew said, "What am I going to do with these children?"

Nanny Jane emerged from Sarah's bedroom and laughed. "Sir, you wouldn't know what to do without them."

"How true," Matthew replied.

Nanny Jane placed a larger chair at the breakfast table and Matthew joined his daughters who were already eating their

porridge. His chair was taller than the child-sized table and Sarah laughed at the sight of her father. His knees squeezed above the table and he had to bend over in an awkward position to reach a glass of juice Nanny Jane had poured for him. Finally, he moved the chair back from the table so he could stretch out his long legs. He had already eaten his breakfast and didn't want a share of his daughter's porridge but drank the juice. Rose's face was soon covered with her porridge and Sarah laughed at the mess. Nanny Jane wiped Rose's face and kissed the fuzzy top of her head.

"Well, I'm off to finish some work," Matthew said. As he handed the empty glass to Nanny Jane. He stared wistfully at Sarah, who reminded him so much of Nan,. "What are you two doing today?"

"I've got lessons," Sarah answered, "and Rose plays with Nanny."

"Well, don't study too hard. "

As Matthew left the nursery he longed for Nan. His daughters helped fill the emptiness of her loss but there was nothing to fill the aching space in his life. Even JoAnna could not help. Matthew was still unable to accept another woman to fill the void. Sometimes at dinner he stared coldly at JoAnna sitting in Nan's place at the table. He resented her presence there instead of his beloved wife. At other times he was glad of JoAnna's company.

Every night JoAnna dined with Matthew. Her home was now open but she was afraid that if she was not there with him, some other woman would be. Even though she dreaded the times when she saw how much Matthew resented her, she stayed to eat with him. Other times she enjoyed their conversation as he talked about his work, his plans, and the frustrations of trying to obtain materials. When he talked about his times with Nan, JoAnna cringed but hid her feelings.

"Nan would have loved Rose," Matthew commented one night at dinner. "Even though we wanted a son, she would have been happy to have another daughter. Rose is such a happy child,

just like Nan was when I first met her. I remember the first time I met Nan. She wore an old dress that was covered in flour because she was helping her mother with the baking. Sarah looks so much like her. Nan was embarrassed to be seen like that. I thought she was a servant, but such a cute one. After that she never let me see her unless she was tidy. I wish Sarah was like that instead of always looking like a ragamuffin child. I miss her so much, JoAnna!"

"I know, Matthew. We all do. At least you have your daughters. They'll always be part of Nan."

JoAnna smiled tenderly at Matthew who was on the verge of tears. She hated these conversations and was glad when there were fewer times he mentioned Nan and more about his work. She smiled when he talked about Sarah and Rose although her thoughts were not pleasant. Why did he spend more time with his daughters than he did with her? She hoped that the longer she was near Matthew he would realize that he loved her.

In the schoolroom Sarah bent over her latest drawing. Her drawing master, Arthur Clark, was pleased with her drawings of birds. However, she only drew the birds without a background.

"Why don't you add some trees, or branches, for the birds to sit on?"

"I just want to draw the birds," Sarah said. She hid the real reason for not wanting to draw backgrounds around her birds.

"But they need something to make the picture better. Are you afraid you can't draw backgrounds?"

"I don't like them with a background. I just want the birds in my picture."

Arthur Clark showed her paintings of birds by well-known artists. The birds were surrounded by scenery to enhance their colours.

"But I just want birds in my pictures. Birds are the only thing I want to draw!" Sarah continued drawing just birds. Arthur was frustrated but finally thought of a solution to the problem.

One warm spring day he followed her to her favourite spot by the river. He brought his own canvas and watercolour paints.

"May I join you, Miss Sarah?" Arthur Clark enquired. "I'd like to paint your birds."

"If you're very quiet," Sarah answered. It was such a beautiful, sunny day and she had wanted to be alone so she could entice the birds to pose for her. "As long as you don't scare my birds I'll let you stay here. They might come up close to you if you don't move around too much."

"I'll be very quiet then," he said, as he smiled warmly at his favourite pupil.

Arthur sat on the ground until the anxious birds stopped fluttering around. He surveyed the scenery, the fingers of light among the rustling leaves, the shadows cast by the branches, diamonds dancing on the water around submerged rocks and the variation of greens. A common egret, its white feathers shimmering in the sunlight, landed at the river's edge. The tall, stately bird stood silent, stared around for danger, then his long beak stabbed in and out of the water as he caught his meal. Arthur Clark opened his sketch pad and quickly, and accurately, sketched the bird's image. Around the egret Arthur drew the river, the dense trees and shrubs along the opposite hilltop. He drew in the spring flowers then added tall bulrushes. Sarah sat beside him and drew the shape of the egret on her sketch pad. Hers was almost as accurate as Arthur's sketch.

The egret finished his meal and was gone long before the painting was completed. Once he was satisfied with the outline, Arthur added the watercolours. He knew this was not one of his best paintings, as it was done too quickly, but he wanted to make his

point about backgrounds. Sarah watched him closely, and forgot about her own sketches.

The green shades highlighted the egret's white feathers. The bird was the center of attention in the painting not the scenery as in the pictures Sarah had viewed. The muted highlights in the leaves made the shimmers in the bird's feathers stand out more. The long beak was exposed by the soft blue of the river. Sarah looked at her own drawing of the egret, white feathers against a white page.

"Now that's a good picture," Arthur said about his drawing, even though he was not totally satisfied with it.

"It does look nice," Sarah said. "My picture looks so empty."

"Why don't you add some bulrushes behind the egret. You don't always need too much scenery, just something to highlight the bird."

Sarah sketched some bulrushes behind the egret, curved rather than straight lines. Then she added mixed green watercolours to the stems and mottled brown to the top.

"Now my picture is not so empty and you can see the feathers better."

"Now you can see why I said you should include more than just the bird in your painting."

"It's hard to draw the background properly. I can never get the shapes right."

"Ah," said Arthur, understanding her reluctance to add backgrounds. "Practice, Miss Sarah, practice and backgrounds will be easier to draw. Those bulrushes look almost real."

"But it was hard making them look like that. I had to keep drawing over and over to make them look like yours."

"Try drawing some backgrounds without the birds then with practice they will look better. You've been drawing birds for a long time and you know how to draw them. Now it's time to practice with other things."

"I'll try."

"You'll do it, Sarah. It just takes time. I had to learn too, and wasn't good when I was your age. So, keep trying and you'll achieve what you want."

Matthew had to travel to a new building site and would be away from home for a month or more. His reputation, for design and quality of work, had added to his already heavy workload. The fee for this project was enormous but it was the building itself that decided him to do it. The client wanted a replica of Fairfield House, built on a hilltop overlooking a beautiful valley, a perfect setting. It would be called Top Hill Manor and was to be built for a cousin of the king.

"Where is Peter?" Matthew asked Harry as they stood in the stables. "I need him to accompany me on this journey and look after the horses."

"In bed, ailing," Harry replied, as he kept his anger leashed. "Beauty didn't like his handling and kicked him in the head."

"She kicked Peter? He's good with the horses."

"Only when you're around, sir," Harry said. Matthew gaped at the surly lad.

For a moment they looked at one another in silence. Matthew assessed the stable boy and was amazed at his lack of submission to his master. Harry was fourteen, almost taller than Matthew. His clothing, tattered pants and cotton shirt, were surprisingly clean. Even Harry's face was clean, nor was there the usual unwashed smell about him that Peter, the head groom, had. Harry stared back calmly and directly at Matthew instead of the subservient lowering of eyes and trembling manner of most stableboys.

"Well then," Matthew said, as he made a sudden decision, "you come and look after my horses on the journey."

"I can't, sir."

"You what?" Matthew shouted, as he gazed hostilely at Harry. "You'll do as I say."

"Then, when we return, sir," Harry said boldly, "your stable of horses will be ill and beyond help. Peter will treat them all badly."

"What do you suggest I do then, boy?" Matthew stated as he stressed the word boy.

"Get rid of Peter and appoint me head groom."

"But you're only a boy."

""I've looked after horses since I could walk, sir."

Matthew gawked at the obstinate youth then walked around the stables. There were ten horses, healthy and well cared for. He patted their noses as he passed. He stopped longer at the stall that contained Beauty, Sarah's horse. Matthew stared closer at the horse and saw whip marks on its flank.

"Did Peter do this?" he asked angrily.

"Yes, sir. Beauty wouldn't let him brush her tail because he always does it so brutally."

"Why haven't I been told about Peter's behaviour?"

"He threatened all us stableboys with a severe whipping. I have felt his lash quite often, sir."

"You are now the head groom," Matthew stated, firmly. "Where is Peter?"

"In the loft, sir. I'll show you where."

In the following week preparations were made for Matthew's journey. He would take four horses, two extra because at this time of the year England's pathways were deep in mud. Matthew was in a hurry to reach his destination and begin the building. Along the way inns were scarce so he and Harry would spend many nights sleeping on the ground.

As Harry traveled with Matthew he discovered a new ambition far beyond that of head groom. But how would he reach this new dream as an uneducated stableboy?

The day came for Matthew and Harry to leave on their journey. Everyone in the household gathered around the horses to wish the master a good journey. JoAnna was there too. Sarah stood near Harry.

"I'll miss you, Harry," Sarah said to him, overheard by her father. "And I'll take good care of Beauty."

"Don't you go riding her too hard, Miss Sarah. Look after our sick birds." Harry smiled down at her and thought of how much he would miss her daily visits to him in the stable.

"I won't forget them," Sarah answered. Standing on her tiptoes she kissed Harry on the cheek. Blushing, she suddenly realized what she had done. Sarah ran into the house and forgot to say goodbye to her father.

Matthew stared at Harry and frowned. When he returned he would see that Sarah spent less time at the stables. She was growing up too quickly.

Matthew was away for two months. During this time JoAnna did not come to the house. The servants heaved a sigh of relief, out from under her dominance, and neglected their duties. Nanny Jane made sure the nursery was kept up to her high standards. Sarah did not miss JoAnna's daily visits.

Rose was now two and a half years old, a quiet, gentle child. She was a plain-looking youngster with none of Sarah's striking features. However, when Rose smiled her entire face glowed with a warm radiance. Everyone loved her, granted her every wish because she never demanded or screamed for things. She followed Sarah around, got in her way when Sarah was trying to draw. Sarah never complained and always put away her own things to play with Rose.

Sarah had her tenth birthday while her father was away. She spent long hours in the stables, drawing pad in hand as the birds darted above her head in the rafters. Often Sarah brought bread

crumbs with her and spread them on the floor of the stable. The birds strutted around enjoying the feast while Sarah sketched their images in her drawing pads. One of the young stable boys sometimes sat with Sarah and she tried drawing him. The pictures were always poorly drawn and an angry Sarah tore them up before anyone could see them. She began drawing parts of the stable and at first they were just a squiggle of lines on the page destroying the background for her birds. Then slowly, the more she drew the lines of the rafters, the straight lines of the stalls, the better they became. She tried drawing flowers but they were just blobs of circles behind her birds. She gave up and concentrated on straight lines.

Often times Sarah sat at the river's edge enjoying the sounds of her birds and sighed sadly. She deeply missed her father and Harry. Without her mother her life felt empty and very lonely. When her father and Harry were home their presence swept away her loneliness.

Cold rain fell over the dreary countryside. The roads were a mire of mud making travel between towns long and almost impossible. Matthew and Harry had taken refuge in a stable two days ride from home. Matthew was tired and longed for his warm bed. Harry wiped the thick mud off the horses and found some of it covering his clothing. He longed for dry clothes and a rest in his own quarters. After he finished he lay down in the sweet smelling hay beside Matthew who was almost asleep.

"Good job, lad," Matthew murmured. "You've done a better job than Peter."

"Thank you, sir."

"We'll have to go back and forth to finish this job. Would you like to come with me again until I can find someone to be my assistant? This will probably take about five years to finish."

"Yes, sir." Harry closed his eyes and felt sad. He had enjoyed traveling with his master and had hoped there would be more

journeys like this one. There were so many new things he had learned, new places he would never have gone without this opportunity. New ideas had been dreaming inside his head that he hoped would lead to a prosperous future. Now Matthew would look for an assistant and that would put an end to Harry's travels.

"I'm worried about Sarah. She spends so much time in the stables with you instead of becoming the young lady she should."

"Yes, sir. She hates wearing fancy clothes that get dirty so easily. I don't think she'll ever be a fine lady like her mother."

"Yes, Nan was like that. Sarah should try, but I can't force her or she throws a tantrum. Rose is so quiet compared to Sarah. Rose will be like her mother. Sarah should have been a boy."

"Perhaps you could train her to be your assistant when she grows older. She likes to draw and could help you with the plans."

"No, not Sarah. She'll always want to draw just birds. No, I'll have to find an assistant. That way I won't have to be away so much. Now, get some sleep, lad. We've got a couple of hard days ahead of us."

Matthew and Harry returned home, weary but happy with the beginnings of Top Hill Manor. JoAnna had sent her servants out in the rain for several days to notify her when they saw Matthew and Harry coming. She was there to greet them at his home and Matthew realized how much he had missed her.

"I'll take the horses to the stable, sir," Harry said after he had dismounted in the yard.

"Thank you, Harry. You've been a great help with the horses and also with the plans for Top Hill. I want you to spend part of your time learning more about my work until I can find someone."

"Of course, sir. I'll train one of the stable lads to take on extra work."

"JoAnna!" Matthew said, jumping down from his horse. He took her into his arms and kissed her. JoAnna was surprised, and very pleased.

"Welcome home, Matthew my love. I'm so glad to see you back safely."

Harry smiled at Sarah and expected her to follow him. She ignored him, shocked by her father's strange behaviour of embracing JoAnna. Sarah had a sudden fear that someday JoAnna might become her stepmother.

"Sarah," Matthew said turning to face her. JoAnna still clung to his arm in triumph.

Sarah stared at her father, as tears formed in her eyes. Then she ran into the house before he reached her. She would never accept JoAnna as her stepmother.

Rose pulled away from Nanny Jane and ran to her father. He picked her up and hugged her tightly. He couldn't understand why Sarah had run off without welcoming him home. Harry understood why Sarah had acted that way. He too could see what the future held and did not like JoAnna anymore than Sarah did.

JoAnna ordered the servants around as if she was already the lady of the house. A welcome dinner was prepared and JoAnna presided at the head of the table beside Matthew.

"Thank you for being here, JoAnna. I dreaded coming home and eating dinner alone. I wasn't sure if you would be here."

"I'll be here every time you want me to, Matthew. I can't take the place of Nan but at least I can be here for you when you need a friend."

Sarah refused to eat supper in the nursery and spent the evening crying in her room. Rose tried to make her stop and play but Sarah was too upset. Nanny Jane was worried about her and went to speak to Matthew. She stopped him outside the sitting room as he left after dinning with JoAnna.

"Sir."

"Yes, Nanny Jane. What can I do for you?"

"It's Sarah. She wouldn't eat her supper and I can't get her to stop crying."

"Do you know what's wrong with her, Nanny?"

"No, sir. She won't tell me."

"I'll come up and see her now, Nanny."

"Matthew, perhaps you should wait awhile," JoAnna said. "She's probably just over tired from all her playing. Sit with me for a moment and we'll both go up and see her.

"Do you think it's anything major, Nanny?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Then, perhaps after JoAnna has gone home, I'll come and see her."

JoAnna smiled sweetly at Nanny Jane then arm in arm with Matthew walked into the warm sitting room where a fire blazed. She wasn't about to let some spoiled child ruin her evening with Matthew.

JoAnna had finally created a need in Matthew's heart for her but could it ever be the deep love he had shared with Nan?

Eleven

Sarah sat up in her bed and listened. The room was still dark, an hour before sunrise, and the sky was thick with gray clouds. Climbing out of bed Sarah quietly opened the door to the nursery. She could hear Nanny Jane snoring softly, and there was no sound from Rose.

It had been a sleepless night for Sarah. She was afraid and there was no one to comfort her. Her clothes had been laid out on a chair and she dressed quickly and quietly. She crept along the dark hallway, down the wide staircase to the kitchen then out through the servant's entrance to the rear yard. The cook and the maids, already up preparing breakfast, did not see her escape. Outside in the yard, Sarah ran to the stables.

The horses were still sleeping in the stables. The stableboys were not awake as their duties did not begin until after first light. Sarah crept into Beauty's stall, knelt down beside her and started crying, wet tears of misery. Disturbed birds darted above her in the wooden beams, twittering their displeasure at the interruption. Some curious birds fluttered onto the top of Beauty's stall. Their noise disturbed Harry, who slept in the loft. He had tossed and turned in his sleep and felt very tired this morning.

During the night his anxious thoughts invaded his dreams as he wondered about Matthew's promise. Did he really mean it or was this just an idle promise to be forgotten quickly? Harry had been angry, thinking of other promises made to him and never fulfilled. Promises made by the former owner of this house that would help

him advance beyond life as a stableboy. He had been seven years old when his master promised to educate him with his own son. Harry was his unacknowledged son. Unfortunately, the man had gambled away his fortune and had to sell everything he owned. The servants remained with the house. Harry thought back to a distressing conversation he had with Matthew as they waited for their meal to cook over an open fire.

"How often does Sarah go down to the stables?" Matthew had asked.

"Every morning, sir."

"What do you two do?"

"She sometimes brings me birds that have been hurt and we nurse them back to health."

"Does she spend a lot of time with you?"

"Sometimes, sir, when she isn't at her lessons or out painting." Harry sensed where this conversation was leading. He was a stableboy and Sarah the daughter of his master. There should not be any friendship between them as he was just a servant.

"You will not improve your status through my daughter," Matthew said coldly.

"I would never use Sarah that way," Harry answered, his voice surly. "My plans don't include her."

"Just what are your plans?"

"To better myself, sir. To read and write. To be somebody other than a stableboy."

Their meal bubbled in the pot, beef stew, and Harry removed it from the fire. He spooned the stew into bowls and handed one to Matthew. They dipped bread into the bowls and consumed their meal in silence. Occasionally Matthew stared at Harry who kept his eyes down. Matthew's unreadable face concealed the questions and thoughts in his mind. Harry stood up with his empty bowl and retrieved the empty one from Matthew. He carried the bowls to a

nearby stream and washed them. When he returned Matthew was already rolled in his blanket and appeared to be asleep. Harry patted the horses and lay down near where they were tethered.

"Goodnight, Harry," Matthew said.

"Goodnight, Sir." There was no further conversation between them that night and Sarah was not mentioned again during the months they were away from Hereford as Matthew closely watched Harry.

Matthew liked Harry. He was a tall, slim lad with sandy blonde hair. His clothes were clean but well worn with many patches. His face had a quiet determination when he completed a requested task. Harry seemed intelligent and often asked questions if he didn't know exactly what was required rather than blindly following instructions. Matthew was pleased with the way Harry cooked their meals over the campfires, without complaint, then washed the pots and dishes clean. Matthew watched how Harry cared for the horses, as he scrubbed the mud off them and spoke gently to them. He watched Harry in the duties requested of him, how quickly they were completed and how well they were done. Matthew wished he had a son to teach his skills to, instead of two daughters. As much as he loved his daughters, he wished he had a son like Harry.

On their last night, while they were camped by a stream, Matthew continued the conversation with Harry about his plans.

"How old are you, Harry?"

"Fourteen, I think, sir."

"Who is your mother?"

"Mary Waters, sir."

"Didn't she die just recently?"

"Yes, sir," Harry answered sadly. "She had been very sick for a long time."

"And your father?"

Harry stared at the bubbling stream and Matthew thought he was thinking of his mother. However, Harry was wondering if he should reveal the truth about his father.

"I don't know, sir," Harry lied.

Matthew ate his meal in silence as he thought about Harry. He had grown to like him and was pleased with his work. Then he made the decision he had been considering in the lack of a son.

"Harry, I need an assistant as there is no son to help me. Would you be interested in learning the trade of designing and building like I do?"

Harry was astonished. He stared at Matthew who smiled back at him. Was this really a chance for him to advance beyond the stable? Matthew too was thinking of the future. If Sarah ever wanted Harry as her husband, then at least he wouldn't be a stableboy. Thinking of himself, of how he had been given the opportunity to be a builder and designer, Matthew could see the potential in Harry.

"You would have to learn how to read and write, to become my assistant."

"I'd do that, sir. I'd study hard and do my best."

Matthew laughed and shook Harry's hand. "You'll do alright, lad."

At that time, Harry had such hope. Now, back in the stable, he worried about whether his master had really meant what he said. He desperately wanted more in his life than as head groom in the stables. The noise of the birds jarred him out of his thoughts and he peered over the edge of the loft. He heard Sarah crying. He knew why she had sought comfort in the stable.

Harry climbed down the loft steps and stood outside Beauty's stall. Sarah lifted her tear-streaked face and looked up at him. She wiped her face on the hem of her dress and stood up. Beauty brushed her nose against Sarah's head, then gracefully stood up expecting breakfast. Harry filled Beauty's food trough then patted the horse.

"There, you go girl."

"Can I help you feed the other horses?" Sarah asked.

"Sure. You know where the pails are." Sarah filled the bucket with oats from the storage bin and filled up the troughs for the other nine horses. Harry opened the stall doors for her and closed them behind her.

"Can I come and help you everyday?"

"That's the job of the stableboys. They need to learn how to feed the horses. You won't always be down here this early every morning."

"I could be!"

Groggy-eyed young lads climbed down the steps and began their duties of cleaning out the stalls. Sarah and Harry walked into the small room for the head groom, which had a fireplace to cook their meals. He lit a fire and hung a pot of stew on a hook over the it. The lads grouped around the small table where empty bowls were laid out. Eagerly they grabbed a bowl and stood in a ragged line before Harry. When steam arose from the pot he put several spoonsful of stew into each bowl. Sarah sat on a bench near the table, her face anxious, streaked with dirt. A watery finger of sunlight pierced the dirty glass of the tiny window and touched her tangled hair.

"Do you think my father will marry her?" Sarah asked.

"Probably."

"I don't want him to!"

"A man like him needs a wife."

"Well, I don't need a mother."

"Rose does."

"She's got me."

Harry sat down on the wooden bench and looked at Sarah. She had begun to cry again. He pulled a rag out of his pocket and wiped her dripping nose. Sarah sat down beside him and he put his arms around her. She was still a child but he could see the beauty that she

would soon become. Harry pulled away from her, his thoughts unwanted.

"Maybe, someday," he thought, "I will be able to tell her how much I care for her."

"Your father doesn't want you coming to the stables as much," Harry said to Sarah, as he stood up, walked to the fireplace and spooned stew into a bowl for himself. "And besides, I won't have much time for you if I am the head groom."

"Did you make my father angry? Is that why he told you that?"

"He thinks you should act more like a young lady."

"But I like coming here with you and helping the birds get well."

"I won't have time for you anymore."

"Now I've only got Rose and she's too young to talk to. Don't you want to see me anymore, Harry?"

"I'm sorry, Sarah. You should do what your father asks."

Sarah got up from the bench. Her world was falling apart and without Harry, there was no one she could turn to for help. She ran back to the house, up to her room and climbed under the covers. Nanny Jane saw her and sighed in frustration. She too could see what the future held and understood Sarah's deep sadness.

Matthew finished his breakfast and entered his workplace. As he removed his drawings from their carrying case he remembered his promise to Harry. It was time to start him learning to read and write before he could train him as his assistant. Matthew opened his study door and spoke to the maid in the hallway.

"Tell Harry Waters to come here right away."

"Who, sir?"

"Harry Waters in the stable."

"Oh you mean Harry. Yes, sir. I'll get word to him."

Harry was re-organizing the duties of the stableboys, checking the horses that had not been properly groomed during his absence.

One of the maids approached him. She held her skirt above the water on the floor that the lads were throwing around.

"The master wants to see you right now," the maid said, "so you'd better get going." The maid was surprised when Harry smiled instead of looking worried.

"I have to clean up first."

"He said right away."

"I won't be long."

The maid stepped quickly out of the way of a bucket of water that the lads threw on the floor, and ran out of the stable. The young lads laughed and spread the water around with a broom.

"Enough of that," Harry said, "now do as you're told. I want everything cleaned up by the time I get back."

Harry poured some water into a bowl and cleaned himself as best as he could. His mother had always given him a piece of soap but the pieces were all gone. The maids hadn't yet washed his extra shirt and pants. His shirt was smudged with traces of dirt and his pants spotted with mud from his journey. At least his hands and face were clean and his hair smoothed as much as possible.

Harry stood in the hallway and knocked lightly at the door of Matthew's study. He was nervous, wondering if Matthew wanted something else rather than training him as his assistant.

"Come in," Matthew called.

"It's Harry, sir," he said, "you wanted to see me."

"Yes, Harry. Come in. "

"Thank you, sir."

"So, do you still want to become my assistant?"

"Very much, sir," Harry said, relieved that Matthew meant what he had promised.

"Well, then. Let's get started. We'd better get you dressed in something appropriate for my assistant."

"What about the horses, sir? Who will look after them?"

"Are any of the other stableboys able to do the job?"

"Yes, sir. Young Tim would be a good head groom."

"Well, after you're finished here, you tell him. Now, I'll have to find you some clothes to wear. Then you'll join Sarah in the schoolroom and begin your learning. I guess you'll also have to live in the house. Can't have you smelling of horses all the time."

"Are you sure, sir? The maids can wash my other pants and shirt. That will do me, sir." Harry was very surprised that he was expected to live in the house. He'd have a real bed for the first time in his life.

"For the moment, Harry. Then we'll get you some more clothes. Can't have my assistant look like a stableboy." Matthew laughed. "Come on. Let's surprise Sarah in the schoolroom."

Matthew opened the schoolroom door and saw Sarah arguing with the tutor. Her torn book lay open, upside down on the floor. Nanny Jane had washed her face and made Sarah put on a clean dress. Her hair was tidy with several curls escaping the bow at the back of her neck.

"What's this, young lady? You refuse to welcome your father home and now you're arguing with your tutor?"

"I don't feel like doing lessons today," Sarah said. "I didn't want to see you after you kissed her."

"Shall I kiss you too?" Matthew teased. "She's only a friend and you're my special daughter."

"I'm sorry. You were away so long and I should have been hugged first."

"Well, come and hug me now."

Sarah ran to her father. Matthew lifted her into his arms and hugged her tightly. She was getting heavy and growing very tall.

"You've grown since I've been away. Look who I've brought to study with you. Harry is going to be my assistant and you'll have to help him learn how to read and write."

"You didn't tell me that, Harry," Sarah said.

"I wanted to surprise you."

"You should have told me."

"Well, I'm here now. Will you help me learn."

"Oh yes, Harry. I'll teach you everything I know."

Matthew and the tutor laughed. Harry smiled at Sarah as she took hold of his hand and led him to a table. Sarah's loneliness and fear disappeared as she showed Harry her books. The tutor retrieved the torn book from the floor and placed it on the table.

"You two be good and listen to your teacher."

"Yes, father," Sarah said, "Harry and I will learn our lessons."

Sarah forgot her worry about her father marrying JoAnna. It was a short moment of happiness for her before the drastic change in her life.

Twelve

Sarah stood in the doorway and watched her father and Harry. A long, wide sheet full of lines and markings was spread out between them. Matthew pointed his finger at various locations on the sheet and explained to Harry what they were. Sarah tiptoed into the room and peered over their shoulders. They looked up and smiled at her.

"Can I see what you're doing?" she asked.

"Girls aren't interested in these diagrams," Matthew replied. He laughed as she bent over the paper tracing her fingers around the lines on the sheet like her father had just done.

"These are drawings, aren't they? I like drawing."

"They're not birds, just empty space."

"This'll be a house someday," Harry bragged showing off his new knowledge. "Your father and I will build this house."

"I can help too," Sarah offered. "I can draw some more rooms for you."

"This house doesn't need anymore rooms," Matthew said. He and Harry smiled at one another at the thought of Sarah trying to draw house plans.

"This is the main floor," Harry explained. The three of them bent over the drawing and Harry pointed out the various rooms. "This is the kitchen with servant quarters here. Down the hallway there is a library where there'll be built-in bookcases. Attached to it is the ballroom. Next to that is the drawing room to entertain guests, and of course the banqueting hall for entertaining. Can you see the curving stairway to the second floor?"

"But that's only lines."

"You have to see it in your imagination," Matthew said, as he winked at Harry.

"Alright, I can see the stairway. Would it be something like the one at Uncle Byron's home?"

"Something like that."

"On the second floor there are twenty bedrooms and the third floor has ten bedrooms."

"That's a lot of bedrooms."

"Some of them will become a nursery, or a schoolroom."

"Where will you build this house?"

"A long way from here," Matthew said. "Harry and I will be leaving soon to see the property, then begin building it this summer."

"Can I come?"

"No, only Harry. He'll tell you all about it when we get back."

"I wish I could go with you."

"What a cozy scene!" JoAnna said as she interrupted them. "It looks like I'll be getting a son as well as two daughters when I marry you, Matthew."

Jo Anna had been standing outside Matthew's office for ten minutes watching the three of them. She was jealous of the closeness they had together and that they had not sensed her presence. Matthew had asked her to wait for the appropriate time to tell Sarah that they were soon to be wed, but jealousy made her spring this news on Sarah.

"Could be," Matthew said. He smiled at Jo Anna, then kissed her soft cheek.

Sarah's face turned pale, and her eyes looked shocked. She couldn't speak and grabbed her father's hand. Matthew looked down at her and put his arm around her shoulders. He knew this would be hard for her to accept.

"You're not marrying her, are you Papa?"

"Yes, I am Sarah. We're being married this spring. I wanted to wait awhile to tell you, and Rose, but I'm glad now you know."

"Why, Papa? I don't need a mother. I'll look after you better than she can. You don't need to marry her!"

"I want to marry her, Sarah, not just because you need a mother."

"Don't you love Mama anymore? She wouldn't want you to marry Jo Anna. Mama never liked Jo Anna. I don't like her either."

"Your mother is dead, Sarah. I can't mourn her forever. Jo Anna and I will be wed and I love her just like I did your mother."

"No!" Sarah screamed. "I won't have her as a mother. I'm not your daughter anymore, neither is Rose. Jo Anna doesn't like us."

Sarah rushed out of the room, her face angry and washed with tears. She scrambled up the stairs to her room where she flung herself face down on her bed. She sobbed angrily, heart broken, as she pounded her fists over and over against the pillows.

Downstairs Matthew looked to Jo Anna for support. He was torn between the love for his daughter, and his love for Jo Anna. He looked at Harry who was slumped against the desk, the house plans crumpled in his hands. Matthew retrieved the drawing from him and smoothed it out across the desk.

"Harry," Matthew said, "please go and talk to her. Maybe you can make her understand."

"I'll try, sir. Sarah will come around eventually."

Jo Anna leaned against Matthew. She had pulled out her handkerchief and was dabbing at her eyes, although she was not crying. She smothered a smile and enjoyed her triumph. Her first attempt at separating father from daughter had been successful. Matthew put his arms around her, to comfort her, and told himself that Sarah would accept Jo Anna. However, he knew this would cause a lot of trouble between himself and Sarah.

"She hates me," Jo Anna said, sniffing into her handkerchief.

"It's hard for children to accept a new mother, especially since Sarah and Nan were so close. Give her time to get used to the idea."

"I've always tried to be a friend to her, but she won't let me," Jo Anna said.

"Just keep trying. She'll change as she gets older."

"I hope so."

Harry knocked on the nursery door and Nanny Jane opened it. She was very relieved to see Harry. Nanny Jane had tried to comfort Sarah but she wouldn't stop crying.

"Come and talk to Sarah, Harry. Tell her it will be alright." Nanny Jane dried her own tears as Harry entered the nursery. Nanny Jane didn't like Jo Anna any better than Sarah did, but she understood the loneliness of a man without a wife. Children were a comfort to a woman when a man died, but a man needed more than just children for his happiness.

"Don't worry, Nanny Jane," Harry said. "I'll convince her that everything will be alright."

"Thanks, Harry," Nanny Jane replied as she turned and picked up Rose from her bed. Rose cuddled close to the only mother she had known and pulled at the lace cap on Nanny Jane's head. Nanny Jane kissed the top of Rose's head as she watched Harry approach Sarah.

Sarah's sobs echoed loudly through the room as she clutched her favourite doll. Harry stood silent, as he wondered how to reach her and ease her pain. He sat on the edge of the bed, reached out and touched her hand.

"Oh Harry," Sarah cried. She sat up and flung her arms around him. "He can't marry her, he can't!"

Harry held her close as she continued to cry. Her tears wet his shirt and he wanted to cry with her, but he was a man and had to withhold his emotions.

"Sarah," he soothed. "It's no good crying. That won't change anything."

"How can he do this to me, to Rose?"

"A man like your father needs a wife," Harry said, "he's lonely."

"He's got me and Rose. What more does he need?"

"You'll understand when you're older."

"I'll never understand why he wants to marry Jo Anna. She's not like Mama. Are you still my friend, Harry? You'll be away with Papa and I'll be here with her."

"Of course I'm still your friend. Jo Anna can be your friend too."

"Never! Never!" Sarah shouted. She pulled away from him and jumped off the bed.

"I'm sorry Sarah. I wish it could be different, but you'll have to accept the fact that she will marry your father. Will you try to accept this? I know it'll be hard but you've got to try."

"Oh Harry. I'll never like it, but I'll try. Will you help me?"

"Of course. Now will you go to your father and tell him you're sorry for acting like this? That will displease Jo Anna when she sees you close to your father again."

"Yes, I'm sorry to make Papa sad. I'll tell him I'll try."

The winter months dragged on and on for Sarah but she hoped they would never end. Sarah tried to be happy for her father, but when he wasn't around she sulked and was miserable to everyone except Harry and Rose. Nanny Jane understood her anger and ignored it when Sarah screamed at her for some small misdeed. Sometimes Nanny Jane lost her temper with Sarah and Sarah apologized for being nasty to her.

"I'm sorry, Nanny Jane," Sarah said. "I didn't mean that. You're almost a mother to me, and especially to Rose. I wish Papa would marry you instead of Jo Anna."

"Now Sarah," Nanny Jane replied, "I'm just a servant and he couldn't marry a servant, could he?"

"Why not? Why couldn't he marry someone like you?"

Spring finally came and the month of April. Matthew had been a widower for almost three years. It was Matthew's wedding day and Jo Anna's home, Ashton Hall, was filled with flowers, busy servants and arriving guests. Three year old Rose was the flower girl dressed in white with blonde curls cascading across her shoulders. She was happy to be the center of attention, a basket of spring flowers held tightly in her chubby hands. Her angelic face was wreathed in smiles as she stood at the foot of the long carpet into the ballroom. Beside her stood an unhappy Sarah, also dressed in white. Almost thirteen years old, Sarah was becoming a young woman. Today her hair was neatly combed and her face scrubbed clean by Nanny Jane.

As Harry sat beside her his face showed concern. He wished he could do something to ease the pain of her father's marriage. Touching her hand she gazed up at him and he saw tears in her eyes. Sarah leaned against him sending strange emotions through him. At sixteen he was seeing Sarah as a young lady instead of the nuisance that she once was. He smiled at her and handed her his handkerchief. She accepted it and wiped at her eyes. Then she blew her nose. Harry smiled as she handed it back to him. Not quite a young lady yet.

Chairs were filled with guests who smiled benevolently at the cherubic Rose. They pitied Sarah with her sullen looks as they understood her feelings about this wedding.

The room hushed, then the violinist began playing as Jo Anna stood at the entrance. Rose carefully walked down the carpet clinging to the basket of flowers until she reached the podium where the minister stood. Sarah walked slowly behind her, then led Rose

to a seat. Harry stood at the back of the room. Jo Anna wafted in dressed in pale yellow, a flowing veil embroidered with tiny flowers. She carried a bouquet of yellow roses and white carnations in her gloved hands. A short veil covered her face, and her face if it could have been seen, carried a triumphant glow. All the men envied Matthew's luck, while the ladies knew what Jo Anna was really like, and intensely disliked her.

The service was too long for Rose to sit quiet, especially with Sarah looking so unhappy. Rose pulled the flowers out of the basket and handed them, one by one, to Sarah to make her smile. Sarah tried to put the flowers back into the basket. As she tried, Rose pulled the flowers out again. She stood up on the chair and handed one to a lady behind her. The lady smiled and accepted the flower. This acceptance made Rose hand another flower to the next lady behind her.

"Rose." Sarah whispered, "Sit down and behave yourself."

"Want to give flowers." Rose protested.

"Shhh."

Attention was diverted from the marriage vows to Rose's antics. The ladies smiled and the men's faces looked stern. The black robed minister glared down his sharp nose at Rose while Jo Anna recited her vows. Sarah managed to pull her back into her seat and keep the rest of the flowers in the basket. After the ceremony it was not the bride who was talked about but the cute actions of young Rose. It was mentioned that Rose was turning into a charmer like her mother. Jo Anna was not pleased.

Matthew and Jo Anna were away for a month's honeymoon, in Paris. Sarah dreaded their return and created more trouble. She neglected her studies and her drawings. Nothing interested her and she spent the time in the stable annoying the horses and the stableboys. The worst result of this marriage was that they would all be living in Ashton Hall, Jo Anna's home.

Nanny Jane stood in the Ashton Hall nursery that had been redecorated for Sarah and Rose. The room was larger and was harder to keep warm. Sarah had a room attached to the nursery and there was a smaller room for Nanny Jane. Sarah hated her new room and Rose missed her own little bed. Nanny Jane sighed and accepted what she could not do anything about.

Matthew and Jo Anna arrived back from their honeymoon. Ashton Hall was filled with activity as servants rushed around building fires in the new rooms, which in spite of it being early summer, was still cold inside. The kitchen was filled with a tantalizing aroma as a huge meal was prepared. A welcome home dinner was organized, with guests coming to hear of the newly wed couple's travels. Sarah and Rose would see their father and Jo Anna in the nursery before their meal. Matthew, and Sarah, were both nervous at seeing each other. Matthew had been told how badly she had behaved, and Sarah wondered how much her father had changed.

Matthew walked into the nursery as Jo Anna hesitated behind him. Rose ran to him while Sarah stared at him from a distance.

"Well, daughters, your father is home," Matthew said. He held out his arms to them and Rose jumped against him. "You've grown bigger, sweet Rose."

"Papa! I missed you," Rose cried, hugging him tightly.

"And you, Sarah, have you missed me?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Then come and give your old father a hug. I missed you too."

"Did you really? I thought you'd be too busy to even think of us."

"I'll always miss my daughters even though I now have a wife."

"Oh, Papa. I missed you too," Sarah said running to him. Tears filled her eyes as he put his arms around her.

"Now, don't cry sweetheart. You'll always be my daughter."

"Hello dear Rose," Jo Anna said, as she held out her arms to her. "You must call me Mamma now."

Rose backed away from Jo Anna. This was the lady who made Sarah so unhappy. Rose ran to Matthew and peeked out from behind him. Matthew sighed unhappily.

"Hello, Sarah. I hope we can be friends," Jo Anna said.

"Maybe," Sarah replied as she clung to her father.

"Goodnight, daughters. Our guests will be here shortly. We'll spend some time together tomorrow and I'll tell you all about our travels."

After dinner when the men retired to the library and the ladies to the drawing room, Matthew turned to Lord Melville for help.

"What can I do about Sarah? She seems to still hate Jo Anna. Harry and I have to leave soon and I'm afraid of leaving her here with Jo Anna."

"Give her time with Jo Anna and perhaps they'll learn how to live with each other. Do you think a visit with Elizabeth would help? They became great friends and are still writing to each other."

"Maybe it would be good for Sarah. Would it be possible and would she go."

"Why don't you ask her tomorrow."

In bed that night Sarah thought of running away and taking Rose. Where could she go? It had been three years since she had seen Elizabeth. She lived nearby and it would be nice to see her again. But would Elizabeth's aunt allow them to stay there. Wouldn't she immediately send them back home? Sarah couldn't live here with Jo Anna while her father and Harry were away.

In the morning Matthew joined Sarah and Rose in the nursery for breakfast. Rose was happy to see her father but Sarah sulked without saying good morning to him.

Matthew told them of their travels while Nanny Jane listened. Then Matthew looked at Sarah and sat down beside her. He put his arm around her and she finally acknowledged his presence.

"Sarah, would you like to go and visit Elizabeth for awhile?"

Sarah looked at her father in amazement. Here was an answer to her plans. She wouldn't have to run away.

"Could I take Rose with me?"

"She's very young and wouldn't be much fun for you to look after."

"I will go with them, sir," Nanny Jane offered.

"Would you like that, Sarah?"

"Oh yes, Papa. You'll be gone and won't miss us."

"I always miss you when I'm away. So, I'll write to Elizabeth's guardians and see what I can arrange. Now do I get a hug."

"Oh Papa. I will miss you," Sarah said as she hugged him.

The visit was arranged and Nanny Jane went with them. Sarah was so happy that she would see Elizabeth that she almost forgot about her father's marriage and her new mother. Fate had a surprise for Sarah, at Elizabeth's home, that would affect her future.

Thirteen

Cold rain washed the dreary English countryside and blanketed it in a thick white fog. Sarah sat inside and stared into the cozy fireplace where flames flickered around the logs. The warmth from the fire did not penetrate into the deep unhappiness she suffered in her gloomy mood. Nearby, Elizabeth sat on a cushioned settee, silent, worried.

The anticipated visit, and escape from Jo Anna, had not helped Sarah. At first, she had been extremely happy to see Elizabeth and they spent several happy days together. Sarah had brought her drawing supplies and together, she and Elizabeth, spent the time filling paper with their bird drawings. Then the fair weather changed to rainy days and Sarah regressed into her black thoughts.

"He doesn't want us anymore," Sarah cried silently to herself. "He doesn't love us anymore, just Jo Anna." Tears formed in her eyes, slid down across her already moist face and dripped onto the cushion she was pressing against.

Elizabeth sighed in frustration. She had been expecting Sarah to be the friend she missed, a friend to have fun with and share secrets. This was not the Sarah she knew, and wasn't sure how to bring that Sarah back.

Rose laughed with joy as she ran into the room and embraced Sarah. "I like it here, Sarah. Why are you crying?"

Nanny Jane followed her into the room and smiled at Rose, then frowned when she saw Sarah.

Sarah wiped her face on the damp pillow then hugged her small sister. ""I like it here too, Rose, but I miss Papa."

"Me too."

"I'm sure he misses you both," Nanny Jane said. She brushed a wet lock of hair away from Rose's eyes, then put an arm around her. She bounced over to Elizabeth and hugged her.

"I like you too, 'lizabeth."

Elizabeth laughed and kissed the top of her head. "You're sweet," she answered. "I'm glad you like it here because I love this house."

"Can we stay here forever?"

"Don't you want to go home some day?"

"Someday."

Elizabeth turned her attention to Sarah and Nanny Jane. Nanny Jane gave Sarah a wet cloth, that she always carried with her to use when Rose needed it, to wash her dirty face and hands. Then Nanny Jane left the room and took the used cloth back to the nursery. That was the moment when Rose saw something interesting that drew her attention away from the unhappy Sarah. On a small table was a delicious plate of gooey tarts and cakes.

"I'm sorry you're so unhappy, Sarah," Elizabeth said. "Can't you forget for awhile that your father has re-married? Don't let that spoil our visit."

"I hate her," Sarah replied as she clenched her hands together making her knuckles turn white.

"Do you hate your father for marrying her?"

"No," Sarah said, "I could never hate him."

"Your father still loves you and Rose. Just because he got married doesn't mean that he stopped loving you."

"But he sent us away."

"I thought you wanted to visit me while he was away?"

"Of course I wanted to see you. You're our sister. Rose and I adopted you, remember."

"Of course I remember," Elizabeth said squeezing into the chair beside Sarah. "I love having you and Rose as my sisters. Maybe Jo

Anna wants your father to herself and suggested to him that you visit me."

"You mean Jo Anna made him send us away?"

"Maybe. Stepmothers don't always like their husband's children."

"She doesn't like us. I won't let her push us away from him."

"So when he gets home, pretend that you are getting along with her and that will make her angry."

"That would make her angry. Maybe that's what we should do. I'll try real hard. I'm sorry I haven't been much fun."

"I'm glad you and Rose came to visit. It's so nice having someone my age to talk to. Aunt Edith and Uncle Charles are good to me, but they're old and can't play with me. My cousin William isn't much fun either."

A loud, harsh laugh echoed through the room. In the doorway stood a tall, thin young man. His thick dark hair was combed neatly across his head. He was a handsome lad but his face was arrogant. He was immaculately over-dressed in a blue jacket trimmed with braid and ruffles around the neck and wrists. Below his knee length black pants he wore bold yellow socks tucked into gold buckled shoes. He was laughing at Rose.

A satisfied Rose sat in a sticky chair. Her face, hands and hair, were coated with cream and strawberry jam. Her white dress was also covered with jam where the pastries had fallen onto her lap. Elizabeth, and Sarah stared at Rose in shock.

Who is this sticky urchin?" William Cantwell asked, as he entered the room. He was Elizabeth's cousin who was also visiting her.

"She's my sister," Sarah said, defending Rose who wiped her sticky hands on the arm of the chair. Sarah felt an instant dislike for the young man who smirked at the mess Rose was in. "And who are you dressed up in all those silly clothes?"

"These are my best clothes," William sneered. "How dare you call them silly!"

"Well, they don't suit you," Sarah said, her eyes angry, her face red. "And my sister's not an urchin."

William stared at Sarah and stopped laughing. He was surprised that he thought she was very pretty. Thirteen year old Sarah was different from the girls his mother introduced him too. She wore a wrinkled blue dress that most girls wouldn't allow themselves to be seen in and there was a hole in her stockings near her shapely ankle. Her face was still smudged with dirt from crying. The wet cloth Nanny Jane had given her had not cleaned away all of the marks of her crying. Her long brown hair was tied back with a bow that threatened to fall off. Cold brown eyes looked angry, fiery, and her hands were clenched together into fists. He felt that she wanted to punch him. While his cousin Elizabeth was the image of a dainty young lady with tidy brown hair, Sarah looked like an orphan child. William had expected Elizabeth's friend to be near her age, not his own age.

"If she's not a hungry urchin, why did she eat all the tea cakes?"

"I hate you," Sarah screamed at William, as she vented her rage at Jo Anna upon him.

"I don't like you either," William said calmly, hiding his liking for her behind his arrogant mask.

Elizabeth moistened a napkin in the water jug and wiped the mess off Rose's face and hands. Nanny Jane came back into the room, smiled at the jam-covered Rose and frowned at the mess on the chair. Aunt Edith entered the room and stared at the sticky Rose. Then she laughed.

"I remember your father once did that, William," Edith said. "He loved his jam tarts."

"I never did that," William said.

"No, your mother never allowed you to have jam tarts. She was afraid you'd get dirty."

"Have you ordered the carriage for me, Aunt Edith?" William said, ignoring her words.

"Yes, William," Edith replied wondering how her outdoorsman brother could be this one's father. "It should be waiting for you now."

"Then I shall depart from all you kind ladies, except the angry one," William said as he smirked at Sarah. She glared back at him, her eyes glittering with rage.

"She really is quite pretty," William said to himself as he turned and left the room.

A maid brought in another tray of pastries as Nanny Jane carried the sticky child out to be bathed and changed. Aunt Edith allowed Elizabeth and Sarah to have a cup of tea with their pastries and soon another plate was empty. Sarah smoldered at the behaviour of William towards Rose and herself.

Elizabeth smiled at Sarah and they both laughed. Rose had been a very funny sight all covered in jam and cream. Sarah would never let William know that she did think Rose looked like a mischievous urchin.

William Cantwell was visiting Elizabeth during the past two years. He did not get along well with his father because his mother lavished attention on him above his two older brothers. William was teased and tricked by his brothers and protected from them by his doting mother. His father did not like him because William was not interested in hunting or riding like his brothers. William's mother had thought that Elizabeth would be a better companion than his brothers and his father was glad to see him leave.

Elizabeth felt sorry for William and tried to be a friend to him. However, she was much younger and the things she liked to do, like drawing, he felt was too childish for a young man to indulge in. He listened to Elizabeth talk about her favourite stories because he was fond of her. In turn, she couldn't understand the things he talked

about to her. Together, studying at their own levels, the loneliness they both felt was lessened by each other's company. Edith and Charles both tried to make William feel at home. For the first time in his life he felt happy, freed from his mother's constraint and his brothers' torments. Now, meeting Sarah and sensing her dislike of him, William again felt he was inferior. All the confidence he had gained melted away. Today he needed that confidence to face the ordeal of the unknown he was stepping into.

As he climbed into the ornate carriage, William shrugged off the memory of Sarah's angry face and brushed drops of water off his lace. A neighbour of his aunt and uncle had invited him to a party for their daughter and her friends on her fifteen birthday.

There were twelve boys and girls, including William, invited to party. They ranged in age from fourteen to eighteen. William, at age fifteen, was taller than most of the boys and dressed much fancier. The other boys wore sober suits of rich velvets, dark greys and white shirts. Their shoes were plain leather and they wore dark coloured socks. Most of them were attractive while some still had babyish faces. The girls were beautifully dressed in light colours of pink, blue or green, embroidered and laced. Some of the girls wore white dresses and plum velvet jackets. Their skirts were wide and swished against the floor as they walked and tittered behind open fans. They smiled at William and exchanged secret remarks behind their fans. He wasn't sure if they found him attractive or were laughing at his clothes like Sarah had done. He suddenly felt shy and awkward.

"So, you're William Cantwell," a shorter young man said to him. "I've heard a lot about you from your cousin Elizabeth. I'm Edward Farnsworth."

"You know Elizabeth?"

"My family is friends of her aunt and uncle and we've dined there many times. She mentioned that you were staying with her this winter but she didn't say how pretty you were."

A few other young boys gathered around Edward, studied William's clothes and sneered at the fancy fashion. William shrank back against the wall expecting them to attack him but he was rescued by the neighbour, Mrs. Melrose.

"Gentlemen, it's time to eat. Please join the rest of us in the ballroom."

A group of musicians stood in a corner of the large room tuning their instruments. Maids placed steaming dishes on the long table and the young guests seated themselves on chairs where place cards indicated their names. William sat between two very pretty girls who smiled at him then laughed behind their fans. He felt extremely uncomfortable and wished he taken his aunt's advice about wearing the plainer outfit she had had made for him. Finally the meal was over and the musicians were ready to play music they could dance to.

The birthday girl, Mary invited William to be her first dance partner. William surprised her. He was an excellent dancer, taught by his mother, and twirled the girls expertly around the dance floor. Soon every girl indicated that she wanted to dance with him inspite of their dislike of his fancy clothes. He enjoyed dancing and his courteous manners endeared him to all the young ladies.

"Well, Miss Sarah," William thought as he partnered another girl, "wouldn't you be surprised to see me now."

William enjoyed the attention of the young ladies but did not enjoy the disapproval of the young men. He wanted a male friend to talk about things that girls wouldn't understand. He could talk to his Uncle Charles better than to his father. All Uncle Charles wanted to talk about was his friends and his club where he and his cronies could drink and smoke without censure from the ladies. William enjoyed target shooting with a bow and arrow, playing cards with his brothers when they were in a mood to indulge him when in the presence of their mother and reading books on battles. Girls weren't interested in those subjects. Once more he wished he taken his aunt's advice.

Alone in the library, where William had gone for a break from dancing, he studied the books on the shelves. He tried to read the titles but the angry face of Sarah kept interrupting his thoughts. The library door opened and Edward Farnsworth entered carrying a bottle of wine.

"Care for a drink," Edward asked, and William shook his head. "Make a man of you. You sure had those girls falling all over you. Wish it had been me."

"Really?"

"Where'd you learn to dance like that?"

"My mother taught me."

"Thought it might have been someone you're sweet on. Come on, have a drink. I hate to drink alone."

"Okay."

Edward handed William the wine bottle. "Drink up lad, and we'll have our own little party."

"From the bottle?"

"Why not, chug it down."

William put the bottle to his mouth and swallowed a mouthful. The wine was warm and tasted fruity. Then he handed the bottle back to Edward. Between them they emptied the bottle and both of them felt the intoxicating effects.

"Think you could teach me how to dance like that?"

"Why not let some nice girl teach you?"

"Then they'd think I was sweet on them. Better to know how to dance so I can dance with all of them instead of just one." Edward's words were slurred and as he stood up he swayed on his feet.

"Come on, buddy. Let's dance."

William swayed to his feet. "Okay chum, let's dance."

After several attempts at making their feet do what they wanted, William and Edward sank back down into the chairs and laughed drunkenly.

"You're not a bad guy after all, inspite of those clothes," Edward slurred.

"You're not bad yourself," William said.

Back at his aunt's home, William's dreams carried images of all the girls he had danced with. Each face faded out as he danced and their faces became the irate face of Sarah. The following morning William splashed his aching head with cold water and promised himself that he would show that angry upstart that he was a man and she was just a child.

Fourteen

In the garden where pink roses entwined over a stone wall, two young heads were bent over sketch pads as a wood pigeon strutted pompously along the top of the wall. They were trying to capture his smooth light grey chest feathers, and a sharp beak that cooed softly. His darker grey wings, edged with a sliver of white, fluttered as he hopped over sharp thorns. Beady eyes watched the sketchers as he preened his feathers. He seemed to be posing as he paused for a moment to display his profile for them to capture on paper. Sarah's drawing was very precise as she sketched in delicate feathers layered along the wood pigeon's wings. His puffed chest was replicated on her sketch as she gently smudged her pencil to soften the lines. Elizabeth's drawing contained the wood pigeon's shape and heavy lines separating his wings from his back feathers. They were so intent on their drawing that they did not hear the sound of horses approaching.

Sarah had been visiting with Elizabeth for two weeks. The weather had improved and they spent most days outside sketching whatever bird frequented the garden. Sarah was once again happy as she immersed herself in sketching, forgetting about her father's marriage and her new stepmother. Her face had browned from the sun and her clothes stayed almost clean. Elizabeth never seemed to get dirty even after lying in the grass sketching. William Cantwell was away visiting so the two girls were enjoying a renewed friendship without his unwanted presence.

The sound of horses' hooves trotting along a dusty road disturbed the wood pigeon. Cooing his distress in the fear of danger

he flew off to protect his nest. Sarah and Elizabeth had completed their sketches of him and were showing each other what they had done.

"Yours is so good," Elizabeth said staring at her own in comparison with Sarah's drawing.

"Your lines are too heavy," Sarah replied. She smudged the dark lines on Elizabeth's drawing and added some thin lines along the wood pigeon's back. "Try softer lines next time. Otherwise, you've got his shape perfect."

"My drawings will never be as good as yours."

"I couldn't draw as well when I was nine. You'll improve when you get older."

Swirls of dust danced through the air above the garden wall. Sarah looked up as a horse and rider stared down at them. Another horse and rider stood behind the first one.

"Papa!" Sarah cried. She jumped to her feet and her sketch pad fell to the ground, forgotten in the excitement of seeing her father.

"So you are glad to see me?" Matthew said as he smiled at his beautiful daughter. Smudges of charcoal decorated one cheek and her hair hung loose across her slim shoulders.

"I'm always glad to see you," Sarah said. She opened the gate for her father and Harry to enter as the pathway led to the stables. "Are you here to take us home?" Sarah frowned as she thought of going back to Jo Anna's home, now her home.

"Do you want to go home?"

"Not yet, and neither does Rose."

"Good because we're not here to take you both home." Matthew laughed as Sarah smiled again. Sarah hugged him tightly after he climbed down from his horse.

Harry climbed down from his horse and smiled at Sarah who smiled up at him. He had grown taller and looked more self-assured after his travels with Matthew. Harry noticed that she looked more

like the Sarah he was used to. There was something different about her, an emerging young lady that she would someday become. For a moment he felt uncomfortable as he realized that in a few years she would be old enough for marriage but never with himself. Ashton Hall had been too quiet without Sarah and her many moods.

"Harry and I are on our way north. We thought we'd stop and visit. Do you think we could stay the night?"

"I'll tell Aunt Edith you're here," Elizabeth offered. She turned to go indoors but her aunt had already entered the garden. She had seen the riders and guessed who they were.

"Of course you'll stay the night," Edith said. "You're just in time for tea. Rose will soon be up from her afternoon nap."

A stable lad appeared and led the two horses away. Sarah linked arms with her father and also with Harry. She led them into the house, behind Elizabeth and Edith.

A white-capped maid appeared and led Matthew and Harry to an upstairs bedroom where a porcelain bowl of water and towels were already waiting for them.

"You can have this room, sir," the maid said to Matthew. "Shall I show your man to the stables?"

"Harry is my assistant," Matthew answered. "He can share this room with me."

"Certainly, sir," the maid replied as she curtsied. She smiled coyly at Harry who ignored her and carried the saddlebags into the room.

Dinner was a lavish affair of spiced ham, fresh baked bread and vegetables from the garden. Matthew had put on fresh clothes. Sarah and Elizabeth were dressed in lacy white, as young ladies should wear. Edith wore a rustling silk gown of green that swirled around her as she walked. Her husband wore a plain brown tweed jacket that was his favourite to wear no matter who was visiting. Harry only owned one outfit for traveling that he had tried to remove most

of the dust from. He felt uncomfortable wearing it to dinner. Matthew noticed his discomfort. He decided it was time to purchase some suitable outfits for him. It wasn't fitting that his assistant should look like the stableboy that he once was.

Harry sat beside Sarah with Elizabeth on his other side. Both girls saw Harry's discomfort as he tried to figure out which utensils to use.

"Use that one, Harry," Elizabeth whispered, pointing to the correct fork.

Harry smiled warmly at Elizabeth and silently thanked her for her help. He also smiled at Sarah but not with the same warmth. Sarah didn't seem to notice his restraint. He began to relax as he understood what was required and toward the end of the meal enjoyed his participation in a family dinner. At Ashton Hall he still ate in the kitchen with the servants as Jo Anna made him feel unaccepted as part of the family.

After the meal the young people, Sarah, Elizabeth and Harry, were allowed to sit in the parlor with a fire burning. The evenings were always cool and a fire was needed if there were guests to entertain. Harry was tired but didn't want to ruin Sarah and Elizabeth's evening. Matthew sat with his hosts telling them the news from home and where he and Harry were headed.

Harry stood before the fire as if he was cold. He felt uncomfortable being alone with two young ladies. Alone with Sarah in the stables where he went when he wasn't working with Matthew, Harry could talk freely. Although Elizabeth was only nine, he still felt uncomfortable with her as she was from one of the titled families. Sarah, looking like a refined a young lady, wasn't the Sarah he knew.

"Harry, come and sit here," Elizabeth said indicating a wing-back chair off to one side. She and Sarah sat in two others grouped around it. Harry sat on the edge of the seat, his feet flat on the floor. He continued to look into the flickering fire.

"How are you and Papa getting along?" Sarah asked.

"Fine," Harry mumbled looking at the floor.

Sarah and Elizabeth looked at each other as they wondered how to make Harry feel more comfortable. He was spoiling their evening by being so shy. Sarah couldn't understand why Harry was like that tonight.

"Are you still taking lessons with Mr. Emers, my tutor?" Sarah said. Harry looked up at her.

"Yes. We miss you asking so many questions," Harry replied as he relaxed thinking of finally learning to read and write. "He says I'm a good pupil."

"I'll bet you're way ahead of me now."

"Maybe," Harry said, as he winked at Elizabeth. "Now I can help you with your lessons."

"Me too!" Elizabeth said. She and Sarah laughed. Harry laughed with them realizing that even though Sarah looked different, she was still Sarah.

He told them the news from home, the birds that still came to the stables to nest in the rafters. There were a few that were injured by the cats but he had trained one of the stable lads how to look after them. He often went over to Matthew's house that had been tenanted by a new family. He told them how he missed his old stables but was getting used to having his own room and traveling with Matthew. By the end of the evening Harry felt comfortable talking with Elizabeth who, although quieter than Sarah, had a friendly personality and lots of questions.

Early the next morning Matthew and Harry prepared to continue their journey to the building site. Sarah clung to her father, afraid to let him go.

"It won't be long before we're back, Sarah."

"I'll miss you and so will Rose." Matthew picked up Rose who was crying against his leg.

"Don't you worry, little one. We'll be back soon."

"Papa, Papa, stay here."

"Sarah's here, little one." He put Rose down and wiped her wet face with his handkerchief. Nanny Jane picked her up and bounced her on her hip.

"Bye Harry," Sarah said standing next to him. She reached out and touched his hand. "Take care of my Papa."

"I will, Sarah," he said squeezing her hand. "He'll be alright."

Sarah smiled at Harry as he let go of her hand. He quickly turned away from her and mounted his horse. Harry wished that he could be more than just a friend to Sarah.

Routine settled in as Sarah and Elizabeth spent the long summer days in pleasant activities. There were breakfasts in the garden watching the birds flutter around busily about their duties. Afternoons of sketching quietly as the birds grew accustomed to their presence. Aunt Edith often took them visiting her friends in her carriage along country roads shaded by trees and bushes. In the evenings Sarah and Elizabeth read favourite stories to each other as Nanny Jane and sometimes Rose, sat in the parlor by the fire. Then William Cantwell returned. He had been visiting with Edward Farnsworth. There was a great change in William.

Gone were his fancy clothes replaced by sedate jackets and pants. He had left his fancy outfits with Edward who now wore them, ignored the taunts from his male friends as he was surrounded by young ladies vying for his attention. William's manner had changed from arrogance to friendliness. William had also learned how to speak eloquently to young ladies and charm them with his words. Sarah and Elizabeth were surprised at these changes.

William bowed to Sarah and Elizabeth when he encountered them in the garden on a sunny afternoon.

"Two magnificent flowers in a garden of ordinary blooms," he said to them.

"Oh William, don't be so silly," Elizabeth laughed, "we're not as pretty as the roses."

"Ah, sweet cousin, your beauty is far greater than a mere rose. And you gentle Sarah, are comelier than any flower."

Sarah blushed not used to such compliments. She stared at William whose smiling face assured her that he meant every word. Forgotten was her anger at him for his sneering at Rose covered in jam. She continued to stare at him and he offered his hand to help her up from the grass.

"May I be of assistance to aid your rise?"

"I can get up by myself," Sarah stated as she grabbed the seat of a chair and levered herself up.

"Then may I help you, dear cousin?"

"Of course you may William," Elizabeth said. She stretched out her hand and giggled as William pulled her to her feet.

"May I take your arm and lead you into tea that Aunt Edith has had prepared for us?"

Elizabeth placed her hand on William's arm. He held out the other one for Sarah and she shyly placed her hand on it. As she looked into his face he smiled warmly at her. She was captivated by his charm and his pleasing appearance. At that moment she had a strange feeling inside her that felt warm and tingled with new awareness of William. It was a heady feeling that made her blush again at his touch.

At the end of the summer Matthew and Harry came to take Sarah and Rose home. Harry was anxious to see Sarah as his feelings for her had changed as he realized that he loved her in spite of his inferior status. He still wore his traveling clothes but at least had one outfit suitable for dinning in.

Harry was surprised to see William Cantwell. He hadn't known there was a cousin of Elizabeth staying with her. From the first moment he saw William he disliked him. Sarah and Elizabeth were

both talking to him, Sarah sitting close beside him. Her face shone with happiness as she looked at him and he smiled warmly back.

Instantly Harry was jealous. Had he already lost Sarah before he could make her love him more than just as a friend?

Sarah waved at Harry when she saw him with her father. Graciously she arose from her chair, no more sitting on the grass for her, and approached them. She hugged her father and smiled at Harry. Rose stumbled across the grass and grabbed her father's leg.

"Papa, Papa."

"Hello little one. Did you miss me?"

"Miss Papa."

"Are you ready to go home?"

"Stay here, Papa. Don't want go home."

Sarah went back and sat down beside William and Elizabeth. Harry was disappointed at her reception of him. How could she favour that fancy fellow over him?

Matthew couldn't understand how Sarah could abandon Harry and spend her time with William. Then as he watched her he realized that his daughter was now a young lady in love. He felt old as he remembered the baby she had been. The years had passed too quickly and soon she would leave home for one of her own. He felt sad at the loss knowing that she would never be the same Sarah.

During their brief stay, on their morning walks, Harry refused to accompany Sarah, Elizabeth and William. He took solitary walks or slouched in the garden reading books that Elizabeth had loaned him. He was glad when it was time for the return journey to Ashton Hall.

"Goodbye Elizabeth," Sarah said as tears glimmered in her eyes. "You will come and visit me."

"Of course," Elizabeth replied tightly hugging her friend. "When the winter's over Aunt Edith says I can come and spend the summer with you and Rose."

"I'll write to you as often as I can."

The carriage was loaded and Nanny Jane and Rose were already seated inside. Sarah climbed in and waved to Elizabeth. William stood quietly beside her and fought with his feelings. Sarah was a beautiful girl who had spurned him but he couldn't stop his feelings for her. He felt unhappy at her leaving and longed to go with Elizabeth next summer to visit. He refused to show any emotion as Sarah smiled at him. He waved briefly then turned and went into the house.

Sarah wondered what she had done to make him so cold to her. Then she smiled as she wondered if it was because he couldn't face the thought of her leaving. This warm thought filled her with happiness until she came in sight of Ashton Hall and remembered that Jo Anna was there.

Throughout the winter Harry studied with Sarah and worked with Matthew. Harry felt that once they returned home Sarah would return to their easy friendship. However, she always seemed deep in happy thoughts and hardly ever went down to the stables to ride her horse and spend time with him. Harry became miserable company and even Matthew noticed the change in his attitude.

Watching him Matthew saw the distance between him and Sarah and realized that Harry was upset because of her. His fear that Sarah would want to marry her stableboy friend would never happen. She had set her sights on another, William. Matthew was unhappy for Harry. Harry would now make a good choice for a husband for Sarah.

Fifteen

William Cantwell rode home in his aunt's carriage. He was full of confidence and plans. The carriage rocked over the dry, uneven lane as the four horses strained in their harnesses. Bouncing over bumps the carriage creaked and groaned, shaking the driver who tried to keep it from toppling over. Inside on the cushioned seat, William was oblivious to everything but his thoughts. His eyes stared into space as he planned his arrival at his home after a three year absence. He wore a dark brown jacket unadorned with frills or lacy cuffed shirt. His long pants were a lighter shade of brown above plain white socks. Gone was the softness from his face, hardened by his thoughts. Clenched in his lap were his smooth hands, the fingers flexing in and out with anticipation. Once in awhile a face intruded into his thoughts disturbing his plans. It was Sarah's face smiling as she had been the last time he saw her before she too headed for her home. William smiled then pushed thoughts of her aside as he contemplated his arrival.

William's father, Robert Cantwell, had received a letter from his sister Edith. She told him how William had changed, how he no longer wore fussy clothes and was quite a likeable gentleman. Standing in the shade of an oak tree Robert Cantwell watched the sweating horses pull the carriage to a dusty stop at the front door.

The dust-covered driver climbed wearily down from his high seat behind the horses. He brushed off some of the dust then opened the carriage door. William stepped down and did not see his father.

Robert stared at his son who had grown taller and carried himself with confidence. "Hello, William."

"Hello, Father," William said when Robert walked toward him.

William looked at his father who was actually smiling at him. He noticed how much his father had aged, his hair peppered with white, his girth thickened.

"Welcome home, William. I'm pleased to see you back with us."

"Thank you, Father." William extended his hand and shook his surprised father's hand. "I'm glad to be back."

"Are you?"

"Yes, Father. Visiting is fine but this is my home. Where is mother?"

Robert Cantwell sighed. "She's had another one of her headaches. She's in her bed."

"Then I will see her later. Where are my brothers?"

"Out riding. They didn't want to waste the day waiting for your arrival."

"Good. Then you have time to hear of my plans before they return."

"Of course, William. We'll go into my study and you can tell me your expectations."

Father and son walked into the house and into the booklined study with dark oak walls. Servants peeked from behind doors as they had heard rumours of the change in William. They snickered among themselves that he couldn't really be any different than before.

Robert settled himself into a large chair behind his paper strewn desk as William stared around him. He'd often been in the study but mainly for stern rebukes. Hands clenched behind his back, William stared at his father and for a moment felt apprehensive like his former self. Then he loosened his hands and pulled a chair closer to the desk where his father sat.

"Would you like some port, Father?"

"Of course," Robert replied, as his face registered surprise.

"Do you mind if I have some of your port?"

"You never liked it before."

"A friend, Edward and I have been drinking port. Besides, I am almost seventeen."

Robert laughed. You're already a young man of the world I see. Go ahead, William, but remember, never drink too much or it becomes habit forming."

"I'll remember, Father." William picked up the crystal decanter and poured the port into two of the glasses on the tray. He handed one to his father then sat down in the chair. Each of them sipped at the port, William to add to his courage. Robert, to face whatever problem William had.

"Father, I want to go to Oxford and become a lawyer like you."

"Is that all you want? I was afraid you had some kind of trouble to tell me about."

"That's what I want, Father."

Robert gulped at his port, then placed the glass on his desk. This was a remarkable change in William, one he'd often hoped for but never believed would happen.

"Then you shall go to Oxford and become a lawyer. I shall make the arrangements and you can go in October."

"Thank you, Father."

"Now go and see your Mother. I'm sure she's wondering why you haven't gone to her."

"I will see her at my convenience, not at her whim."

Robert's face reflected his surprise and pleasure that William had finally pulled back from his mother's control. The library door banged open and William's two brothers walked in. They were disheveled from riding, their expensive outfits coated with dust. They stared at the person sitting with their father. William

sipped calmly at his port, as their surprised faces registered who he was.

George and Frederick were very different from William. They had a robust, outdoor appearance much like their father. Frederick was fourteen, his height inches shorter than William. George was twelve and taller than either of his brothers. Their bodies were muscular from walking, riding and hunting which was their favourite pastime. William continued to sit as he stared at them, a mischievous smile on his face.

"You look like you fell off your horses. Or has Father had you working in the stables?"

"Watch your cheeky tongue," Frederick said, the more aggressive of the two brothers. "Or we'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

"Well then, I'll give you the chance to try." William drained the last of the port from his glass, placed it on the desk then stood up.

"What?" Frederick said, "You puny coward?"

"I said I'd give you the chance to beat me."

"Of course I'll beat you. I always have in the past. Your fancy manners won't protect you."

"Come on outside and we'll see if you can still beat me." William removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. Then he strode from the study followed by his two perplexed brothers. Frederick looked to his father for support but Robert had risen and was following William.

Word spread quickly throughout the house that William was going to fight Frederick. In her room his mother had to be restrained, then fainted before she could intervene and protect her precious son. Work stopped as the servants gathered inconspicuously to see the outcome.

In the garden William faced Frederick who seemed a bit apprehensive. William spit into his hands and rubbed them together.

He dodged Frederick's swift attack, a fist aimed for his head. William smiled in triumph at the surprise on his brother's face. William's fist smashed into Frederick's face. Blood flowed from a broken nose.

Fury filled Frederick and he lashed out blindly ignoring his pain. He rushed at William who calmly stepped out his reach. Frederick tripped and William was on top of him.

Again and again William pounded Frederick with his fists, releasing the hate he felt for this brother who had always been his tormentor. Euphoria filled William then anger took control of him. Over and over he continued to pound his fists into Fredrick.

Robert realized that this was not just a fight, that William, if he wasn't stopped, would kill Frederick.

"William, William. That is enough. You've beat him." William did not stop. Robert called to several of the servants, two husky men who worked the fields. They rushed toward him and grabbed William's arms, almost becoming involved in the fight. Finally, he was pulled away from Frederick.

William's shirt was torn, his pants bloody from his brother's cuts. George stared at William then bent down to Frederick. He was still breathing but had been knocked senseless. Other servants scurried to help and Frederick was carried into the house. He was badly injured with a broken nose and several cracked ribs. The doctor was immediately summoned.

Robert helped William into the house and offered him another glass of port. "You've changed too much. Now that you have revenged yourself for their treatment of you, forget the past and go to Oxford. I'm glad that you have become a son I can be proud of, but fighting like that will only get you into more trouble. If this wasn't your brother, you'd be standing before a magistrate. Here, drink this and clean yourself up."

"Yes, Father. I'm not the fop I once was. I'm glad I fought him. Now he knows what it's like to be the underdog." William took the

goblet his father offered him and in one gulp, emptied the contents of the glass.

Several days earlier Sarah, Rose and Nanny Jane traveled home with Matthew and Harry. Edith had sent them in her carriage while Matthew and Harry rode their horses. Sarah dreaded the return to Ashton Hall and her stepmother, Jo Anna. She thought of William and these pleasant thoughts kept her fears away. Rose was excited about a long carriage ride but after a few hours began to complain about her confinement. Nanny Jane finally got her to sleep and the rest of the ride was quiet.

Jo Anna was waiting in the parlour for them to arrive. She tidied her hair and pinched her cheeks to give her some colour. A warm green gown covered her shapely form and she anxiously studied herself in a mirror. It had been three months since she had seen her husband, Matthew.

"Madam, they're here," a servant said as she carried tea and biscuits on a tray, which she set down on a table.

"Thank you. I shall wait for them in here. Please send them in."

Jo Anna stood up as Matthew, still in his dusty clothes, rushed into the room. He hugged and kissed her passionately.

"I've missed you, Jo Anna."

"I'm so glad you're back," Jo Anna said hugging him then pulling away. "You look wonderful but you should have changed first."

"I was anxious to see you," Matthew replied. He smiled broadly and began dusting his clothes.

"I'll have the servants prepare a bath for you."

"Thank you, dearest."

Rose and Sarah stood quietly in the room watching their father and his wife. Sarah took Rose's hand ready to go up to the nursery.

"And how are my two children?" Jo Anna asked approaching them. "You both look well after your visit."

"Fine, thank you," Sarah said. "We had a good visit with Elizabeth."

"I've missed you too," Jo Anna said, although she had enjoyed her time away from them. "Now off you go. Nanny Jane will get the nursery ready for you, Rose."

"Sarah's now a young lady and should eat with us," Matthew said as he put his arm around his daughter, and looked lovingly at her.

"If that is what you wish," Jo Anna replied, "she shall eat with us."

Two peaceful years passed and Sarah began to accept her stepmother. She continued sketching, becoming more proficient and learned how to use water colours on her work. Jo Anna tolerated her and was pleasant. Harry no longer studied with Sarah. Instead he worked daily with Matthew and showed promise of a successful architect. Jo Anna did not become pregnant and despaired of ever having Matthew's child. She was extremely jealous of Sarah's closeness to her father, and of the fresh young beauty of Sarah. Jo Anna worked hard to keep her own attractive image but could not keep her youthfulness. Jo Anna's jealousy finally forced her to action when Sarah was fifteen.

"Matthew," Jo Anna said one night in bed. "Sarah needs to learn how to become a proper young woman. She is too wild and unrefined to get a husband."

"She hardly pays any attention to him," Matthew replied. "I had hoped she'd marry Harry now that he has potential."

"Sarah can do better than that. He's a servant's child."

"He's a good reliable man and would make Sarah a good husband."

"If she hardly pays him any attention, it doesn't look like she wants him for a husband."

"She's too young to think of marriage – she's only fifteen."

"I wanted to marry you long before that. It's time she thought of her future. She can't live with us forever."

"You're right as usual. She's growing up."

"There are some good schools in London where we can send her. The best schools will make her a viable young woman. You don't need to worry about the cost."

"Alright," Matthew said, deeply saddened. "I wish she could remain a child forever but that isn't possible. I shall miss her."

Matthew called Sarah into his office. Harry was there as well. Sarah rushed in and hugged her father. Matthew dreaded telling her.

"Sarah, it's time you went away to school. You've outgrown your tutor and perhaps you'll even find an excellent drawing master."

"Go away to school! I don't need a school. I'm happy here and my drawing is improving."

At a small table, Harry pretended to work on an interior sketch of the house he and Matthew were commissioned to build. He hadn't known why Matthew had called Sarah and he knew who was behind this scheme. He had seen Jo Anna's jealousy with Matthew and Sarah's closeness. He saw Jo Anna standing in the doorway of the office trying not to be seen.

"You have to grow up someday, Sarah, and going away to school will prepare you for finding a suitable husband."

"I don't want a husband." A face intruded into Sarah's thoughts, William Cantwell and she remembered how often she had thought of him as a husband. "I don't want to leave Rose."

"Nanny Jane will look after her."

"But she needs me!"

"We don't want you to leave us but someday you'll have a home and family of your own. This will prepare you for that."

"Papa, is this what you really want?"

"No, Sarah, but it's inevitable."

"You'll enjoy school," Jo Anna said as she entered the room. "You'll make some friends. It must be lonely here for you with Elizabeth so far away."

Elizabeth was already in a London school for young ladies. Sarah often wrote to her but Elizabeth seemed too busy to reply as often. Perhaps she would get to see her or even go to the same school. Sarah looked at Jo Anna and caught her swift glance of triumph. Then she knew why she was being sent away and the two-year truce between them vanished.

Sarah dragged herself into the nursery to tell Rose. "Rose," Sarah said, "I'm being sent away to school."

"No," Rose replied. She was now six years old and followed her big sister around everywhere. "You can't go away."

"We're going to London in two weeks and I may not be back if they find a school for me."

"No!" Rose cried as she flung herself against Sarah. They both tumbled to the floor. Rose's tears wet Sarah's face and clothes as she clung to her. Nanny Jane heard the commotion and entered the nursery and felt tears forming in her eyes. Rose would not stop crying. Nanny Jane helped them to their feet as Rose held tight to Sarah.

"I'll never leave you, Rose."

"I want Sarah to stay!"

"It's time for her to go away to school. Someday you'll go to school too."

"I don't want to go away and I want Sarah to stay."

"I wish I could Rose, but I have to go."

"No!"

Matthew, Jo Anna and Sarah travelled to London in search of a sensible school. They visited several of the better schools that

offered placement with other girls of Sarah's age and status. Sarah would not decide on which of the schools she preferred. Jo Anna chose one for her, the one she herself had attended.

Sarah instantly hated it. She hated anything connected with Jo Anna. "She wants me out of the way," Sarah moaned silently to herself on the journey home. Why can't Papa see that?"

Harry left his first floor room, close to Matthew's study, when he heard crying. He entered the study and saw Rose curled up in Matthew's chair sobbing loudly. Harry wished he was young enough to cry like Rose. He walked up to the chair and bent down beside the crying child.

"Rose, crying won't bring Sarah back. I miss her too."

"I'll never see her again."

"Yes you will. She'll be home for Christmas and all holidays. London isn't that far away."

"That's a long time."

"Not that long. Maybe you can look after Sarah's birds for her. That will make the time pass."

"I don't know how." Rose dried her runny nose on her sleeve and looked up at Harry.

"I'll show you how."

"And can I ride Sarah's horse? Beauty will miss her too."

"Of course. You and I will go riding together."

Rose threw her arms around Harry's neck and kept crying. Harry smiled and resolved to spend more time with Rose. They needed each other.

Sixteen

Sarah hated the school, Manor Academy because Jo Anna had chosen it. Manor Academy was a school for privileged daughters of the socially elite of England. The three-story building was always cold and damp with no fires allowed in the room's fireplace. The classrooms were dark and the windows covered with heavy drapes. Drawing classes were held outdoors in warm weather but when it rained Sarah was expected to draw indoors and create pictures other than just birds. She hated the teachers who considered her an unruly child when she refused to draw what they wanted her to draw, to their specifications.

The other students at the school looked on Sarah as beneath them. She was only the daughter of an architect and they despised her working-class status. Amelia, the girl who roomed with Sarah, hardly spoke to her and went out of her way to make life miserable. Sarah's books often were missing, her notebooks and drawings mysteriously developed ink splotches, and her clothes sometimes were found wrinkled on the floor of the room. Sarah complained to the teachers but they dismissed these problems as simply the girls teasing a new student.

"Miss Purcell," said Miss Addly, the head of the school, "these girls are just teasing you because you are new. Ignore their pranks and they'll soon stop."

"I want to go home."

"Really now, you are too young to decide what is best for you. Your parents have chosen this school to turn you into a fine young lady. You owe it to them to continue here."

"Jo Anna is not my mother. She chose this school to get rid of me."

"How unkind you are. Jo Anna has done her best for you."

"I don't like her at all."

"Mind your manners, Miss Purcell. You are here to be schooled and educated as a young lady should be. Now this interview is over and you have studying to do." Sarah took matters into her own hands.

During the night, when the girls were sleeping, Sarah exacted her revenge. In the morning the worst offenders discovered shoelaces tied together in knots which had to be cut because they were so tight. Other times they found their uniforms had holes sliced through them. In class those sitting ahead of Sarah were poked with sharp pencils and reprimanded for their outbursts. Sarah's pencil always sat on her desk in full view and she was never accused of the jabbing. In the hallways, Sarah accosted several of the meanest girls.

"Want more of these problems? Then leave me alone or I'll get you all into trouble." Her angry face frightened the girls and finally they left her alone.

Letters were sent to Sarah's home detailing how unhappy she seemed and how unhappy the school was with her demeanor. "Sarah is not doing well at Manor Academy," the letters read, "nor are the teachers pleased with her conduct." These letters were always received by Jo Anna, who kept them from Matthew. "Give Sarah time to adjust," Jo Anna wrote back, always enclosing an extra fee to the school for their trouble. "She will settle in and come to love the school just like I did."

Sarah wrote home but her letters were read to her family by Jo Anna who always made it seem that Sarah was enjoying the school. Matthew and Rose wrote to Sarah relating all the things that were happening, how Rose and Harry were caring for her birds and

spending a lot of time together. This made Sarah very homesick. Elizabeth often wrote to Sarah about her own school that was pleasant for her. She sometimes mentioned William and how he was doing at Oxford. Elizabeth wrote of how popular William was with the girls he met at their coming out parties. These mentions of William upset Sarah as she remembered how he had laughed at Rose covered in jam. Yet the memory of how he looked the last time she had seen him made her wistful and wished she could see him again.

"Do you ever tell him about the things I am doing?" Sarah wrote in her letters to Elizabeth. "He is so different from the first time I saw him."

"I never write to him," Elizabeth replied in her letter. "I just hear about him from Aunt Edith. I hope we can get together soon. I miss you and Rose" In the ensuing years at the Academy, letters between Sarah and Elizabeth became fewer and fewer as the two friends drifted apart.

Sometimes the girls from Manor Academy took trips outside the school grounds into the teeming life of London. The streets were smelly with unwashed bodies passing by and garbage strewn around. They always went by carriage, three carriages carrying five girls each. Once in awhile the trip was to a park to wander through the flower gardens. Sarah enjoyed these few times to listen and watch the birds flitting above them as the girls neared the nests.

"Bird girl must be enjoying this," Amelia whispered to her peers. They all stared at Sarah and laughed softly. Sarah ignored the taunts and sketched in her mind what she would draw on paper.

"Miss Purcell," Miss Addly called out sharply, "keep up with us or you'll be left behind. And do watch for that puddle or your dress will be muddied."

"I don't care if I'm left behind and my dress is already muddy."

"Careful, miss. Your tongue will get you into trouble again."

Holidays, such as Christmas, midterm breaks, Sarah was allowed freedom and a return home. She cherished these times and tried to change her father's mind about sending her back to Manor Academy.

"Please let me stay home. I can learn more here and you can get me another drawing teacher."

"Sarah, Jo Anna says this is the best place for you," Matthew said, surprised that from her letters she seemed so happy there and now didn't want to go back. "Don't you like it there?"

"No, Papa. The teachers don't like me, and the other girls make fun of me. I hate that school."

"Now, now, Sarah," Jo Anna laughed. "It's different from home. That's why you don't like it. Here you can do anything you like, wear anything you like and never become a gracious young lady. Manor Academy will make you into someone your father will be proud of."

"But if she doesn't like it, Jo Anna," Matthew protested as he noticed tears on Sarah's face, "maybe we should let her come home."

"Matthew, someday she has to grow up. Soon she'll be ready to get married and no husband wants a wife who is spoiled."

"I'm not spoiled!"

"You must learn that you can't always do exactly what you want," Jo Anna stated firmly, "and this school will teach you what you need to know to find a suitable husband."

"I'm never getting married."

"You can't live with your father forever just drawing birds."

"Now Sarah, perhaps Jo Anna is right. Someday you'll want a home of your own and a family. This school will teach you what you need to know."

"Enjoy your time with us and then you must go back."

Sarah knew she must endure the school as there was no other choice. She hoped that when she was finished she could come home

and not have to get married right away. She would not marry anyone that Jo Anna approved of.

"Harry, are you going to work with my father all day?" Sarah asked. She stood in the doorway of the study and watched him write down measurements on a drawing.

"We've got to get this finished before your father and I travel to the building site."

"When will that be?"

"In a week's time."

"I'll be gone by the time you get back."

Harry looked up from his work. He stared at Sarah who had grown taller, her brown hair hanging loose around her shoulders. Sarah looked unhappy as her face frowned down at him. At almost fifteen she was getting the shape of a young lady as her bodice stretched across her bosom. Harry smiled then sighed in frustration as he thought of what could never be.

"Why don't you see what Rose is doing?"

"Nanny Jane is teaching her how to do a cross stitch pattern. They wanted me to do it with them but that's boring."

"Then why don't you take Beauty out for a ride. The weather's cooler and she needs the exercise."

"I'm not in the mood."

"I'm sorry but I have to get this done. I can't spend time with you right now."

"Nobody has time for me. I might as well be back at school. Things were so good before I left."

"Everything changes, Sarah. You can't expect things to remain as they were," Harry said.

At age seventeen Sarah was considered beautiful except for the deep sadness that was constantly visible on her face. She refused to

wear the frilly clothes that other girls considered fashionable. Instead she wore a simple straight-cut style that highlighted her features. Her hair was pulled back from her face and hung down her back without being curled. This natural look suited her and being different made her more disliked by her classmates who considered her manner of style appropriate to her station in life. Sarah had not made any friends in the years at the school. Then one day everything changed.

Drawing class was very popular with the students and it was the only course that Sarah excelled in. A new artist, his work recently recognized as brilliant, was scheduled to visit this class. The teacher, Miss Major, walked into the class of expectant young ladies. With her was the handsome, bachelor artist Richard Beacon.

Richard smiled at the primping young girls who welcomed him with eager eyes as they tried to capture more than just his attention for their drawings. He stared at one student in unadorned attire and wondered why she seemed familiar. Then memory surfaced as he remembered a child sketching birds by the river Wye wearing a ragged, dirty dress.

"How are your birds, Sarah?" he said, smiling as he walked toward her desk.

"You know me?" she stammered looking up in amazement. Her classmates were stunned that this now famous artist would know Sarah, and were instantly more jealous than ever of her.

"You once told me to paint birds in my pictures," Richard laughed. Sarah smiled up at him as she remembered.

"You were staying with Uncle Byron."

"You'll be pleased to know that sometimes I do paint birds in my pictures."

"Mr. Beacon, the other young artists would like some of your attention. Sarah doesn't need your expert advice."

"Ah, but Sarah is one of my first pupils, so I am anxious to see how much improved she is."

"Her work is among those on display for your perusal," Miss Major insisted leading him away from Sarah. "Here is the collection of excellent drawings that I mentioned that you would be interested in."

Most of the drawings on display were scenery and elegant manors set in gardens. Except for one drawing of a red breasted robin on the limb of a tree. Behind the robin was only a hint of the branch he was sitting on. Richard paused for a lengthy time viewing this painting as Miss Major tried to pull him away to view the others. Sarah had improved significantly and he was pleased with what he saw. Compared to hers, the other drawings were similar and insignificant.

"Sarah has a great talent."

"But only for birds. She refuses to draw anything else." Richard laughed as he thought of the urchin that had told him she only wanted to paint birds.

"If that's all she wants to paint, then so be it. She'll become known for her birds."

Sarah smiled at Richard as he winked at her. Her sadness dissolved and her face beamed with happiness. Her classmates whispered among themselves and threw hateful looks her way. She didn't care that the girls hated her even more. Richard had praised her bird painting.

After his tour of the school Richard spoke to Miss Addly. "I'd like to take one of your students out for dinner."

"That can be arranged," she replied. "Which of the young ladies have you chosen?"

"I'd like Miss Purcell to accompany me."

"Miss Purcell! There are better choices than her."

"No, Miss Addly. She's the best choice."

"How long will she be with you?"

"Perhaps overnight. My mother and I have a place in London and my mother would love to meet her."

"If you wish, sir. I will ask Miss Purcell if she wishes to visit with you."

Sarah was enthralled to be asked to visit with Richard and his mother. She carefully combed her hair and changed out of her school outfit. Dressed in a white blouse, green skirt and matching jacket Sarah entered the room where Richard waited. She looked beautiful and her face radiated happiness.

Richard smiled at Sarah and realized that she was no longer the urchin child but a very beautiful woman. He was excited at the prospect of spending time with her away from the Academy.

Miss Addly smiled warmly at Richard Beacon and stared sternly at Sarah.

"This is an exceptional opportunity, Miss Purcell. Use it wisely." Sarah ignored her.

"Shall we go, Miss Purcell?" Richard said offering her his arm. "My carriage awaits."

"Yes, sir," Sarah replied placing her hand on his outstretched arm as young ladies were taught to do.

Miss Addly smiled stiffly as she thought, "won't be long before this one's gone and married."

"So this is the urchin child you once mentioned to me," Mrs. Beacon, Richard's mother said to Sarah.

"Not anymore, Mother," Richard answered as his mother kissed Sarah on the cheek, "she's all grown up and turned into a beautiful swan."

"That she has."

Sarah blushed but immediately liked Richard's mother. "We've got a room ready for you and dinner will be served in awhile."

Dinner was a lavish affair in the mirrored dinning room. Richard's mother did her best to impress Sarah with what a wonderful man her son had become even though he was just a

painter. She wondered if this was the woman who might possibly become her daughter-in-law.

Sarah laughed more than she thought was possible and thoroughly enjoyed herself for the first time since the death of her mother. She read the looks exchanged between mother and son and knew what the message was. Richard was a handsome prospect, respected in his field. Memories of William Cantwell made her realize that Richard was not the husband she wanted.

"Do you enjoy your school?" Mrs. Beacon enquired as they sat in the parlour after the meal. Sarah hesitated, wondering whether to tell the truth or pretend she liked the school.

Mrs. Beacon saw the truth without Sarah saying a word. "You'll be finished soon and can go home."

Once again Sarah hesitated, her face shadowed with unhappiness. When she looked at Mrs. Beacon, Sarah could see that without words she understood. She had told them at dinner about her sister Rose and her father's remarriage.

"Well, if you don't want to go home, then why don't you come with Richard and me to Kent. We have a large home there and I would love to have a young girl like you around to keep me young."

"I don't know. Rose misses me and is looking forward to me coming home."

"Well then, she can come and visit too."

"Jo Anna is sending her to the school next year."

"Then she'll need to be with you before entering the school. Think about it and write to your father and see what he says."

"All right, I'll write to him. Jo Anna will be so pleased not to have us around."

The following year was one of supreme happiness for Sarah and Rose as they visited Richard and his mother. Sarah spent many hours with Richard as he guided her on perfecting her drawing techniques

and perspective. Rose enjoyed being away from Jo Anna but missed her father and Harry. Richard was often absent from home and Mrs. Beacon enjoyed the company of the two girls. Sarah had her eighteenth birthday.

Richard longed for the day when she would become his wife. Each time he tried to introduce the subject of marriage Sarah immediately talked about something else. She was grateful to Richard but there was no spark of love for him. William Cantwell was still the image in her mind.

During this year Sarah began writing to Elizabeth again. Elizabeth, now sixteen, was pleased to hear from her again and shared her surprising news with Sarah. She had fallen in love with a soldier and they were to be married in December.

"Please come to my wedding," Elizabeth wrote, "and be my maid of honour. You're my sister and I would love to share this with you. Would Rose come too? You could bring this artist of yours."

"Of course I will be your maid of honour," Sarah replied in her letter. "Rose has just started at the school and won't be able to attend. I can bring Richard, who is an artist, just a good friend."

The home of Edith and Charles Cantwell was a bustle of activity when the carriage conveying Sarah and Richard pulled up to the front door. Elizabeth greeted Sarah with a warm embrace and smiled at the handsome man standing beside her. Elizabeth led them inside the house and a maid showed them to their rooms. Elizabeth sprawled across the bed in the room reserved for Sarah and plunked down beside her.

"So you're getting married." Sarah noticed that Elizabeth had put on weight as her body strained against her dress.

"Jack is a wonderful man and I love him dearly. Are you going to marry Richard?"

"He's just a friend."

"But you're living at his home. Does he want to marry you?"

"I think so, but I'm not in love with him."

"You're not thinking of William are you?"

Sarah didn't answer but blushed and Elizabeth groaned. "He's got every girl who sees him trying to lead him to the altar. But he asked about you when I told him you were my maid of honour."

"What did he say?"

"Just asked if you were coming."

"At least he remembers me."

William Cantwell stood at a window overlooking the driveway and watched Sarah and an unknown man step out of the carriage. He smiled maliciously as he watched them enter the house. "The time for revenge is near," he said silently as he thought of her hateful words to him many years ago.

William walked into the library where Richard Beacon and Charles Cantwell were in conversation. The two young men stared, assessing each other, then extended their hand.

"William Cantwell, Elizabeth's cousin."

Richard Beacon."

"Your wife is a good friend of Elizabeth," William said. "I remember her as a gawky girl. She has become a beautiful woman."

"I wish Sarah was my wife," Richard said sadly. "At the moment she is only my favourite student."

"Oh yes. I remember hearing about you, a popular artist. I might buy one of your paintings myself."

"I doubt if you'd be happy with my country scenes," Richard answered suddenly disliking William Cantwell. "They're too quiet for you."

"That's true," William laughed, "but they're a good investment right now."

Jack Rodgers stood at the altar in his red dress uniform and smiled happily as his beautiful bride began her walk toward him. She had yellow flowers braided through her hair and was dressed in ivory silk. Her hands were primly folded around a similar bouquet of yellow matching flowers with long dangling ribbons. Demurely she stepped toward her future husband, her face glowing with happiness. Sarah waited on one side of Jack and his groomsman was on the other side. The minister smiled at the young bride and held the wedding book in his hands. Elizabeth reached the minister and handed the bouquet to Sarah. The ceremony was brief and Elizabeth and Jack were now husband and wife. Sarah listened carefully to the minister's words and glanced several times toward the chairs where William sat beside Richard. Richard thought the glances were for him and he was determined to find a moment to speak to Sarah about marriage.

Beside him William stared transfixed at the beautiful woman Sarah had become. Her hair was entwined with flowers braided over her head. She was dressed in pale green that highlighted her eyes. He had almost decided not to wreak his revenge on her but could not free himself of her noxious words that stung his pride. *"...who are you dressed in all those silly clothes..."* He would show her who he was!

A gala reception followed the wedding with an orchestra playing music for dancing. Sarah danced with Richard but her eyes were focused on William. Richard saw this, saw the wistful looks she gave him and understood her reluctance to talk of marriage with him. It appeared that Sarah's love was already taken.

Sarah rested for a moment seated with several of the guests, young women like herself who were Elizabeth's friends from school. William saw the young ladies seated with Sarah and walked toward them. Sarah waited expectantly for him to ask her to dance as William had danced with the young ladies beside her.

William, now twenty years of age, had become a handsome man. He was tall and slim, his dark hair tied back with a black bow. Dressed in a brown velvet knee-length jacket, with wide cuffs, William looked the elegant gentleman. His light brown breeches, just below the knee, highlighted his white knee socks and buckled black shoes. The white shirt he wore had ruffles at the front tucked neatly inside his jacket.

Sarah found it hard to remember him as the over-dressed dandy she had met many years before. She sighed as she stared up at him and her heart leaped with hope.

"Would you like to dance?" William said to the girl seated next to Sarah. He completely ignored Sarah who implored him with her eyes to ask her to dance.

"Oh yes," the girl gushed jumping up. "You're such a marvelous dancer.

In shock Sarah watched the two of them glide across the floor in perfect harmony with the music. The other girls glanced at Sarah in confusion.

The girls couldn't understand why William had treated Sarah so rudely. Perhaps he wasn't the gentleman they thought he was.

Sarah's heart was broken. William did not want to dance with her and had embarrassed her by dancing with everyone else. Was it because he knew she was with Richard. No, that didn't stop him from dancing with other escorted ladies. Why wouldn't he dance with her?

William escorted the girl back to the seat beside Sarah. Sarah stared at him begging him to ask for the next dance but he insolently ignored her plea.

"Thank you, sweet lady for your company," William said kissing the girl's hand. "You too are a delightful dancer." Then he walked quickly away.

Sarah felt the tears collecting in her eyes and made a hasty exit to the dark garden. Here she let her tears fall. Richard found her here.

"Sarah what's wrong?" He sat down beside her on the iron bench.

"Just happy for Elizabeth," Sarah lied.

"Or unhappy because that Cantwell fellow won't look at you? He's an uncouth cad."

"How did you guess?"

"I've watched you all night trying to get his attention. He's not worth it. He has a bad reputation with the ladies."

"I know. Elizabeth has often told me that. I can't help it. I've loved him for a long time."

"Then there's no hope for me. I've loved you since you were a child."

"Oh, Richard. I'm sorry. You're a very nice man, but I can't help who I love."

"I had hoped you'd be my wife someday. Maybe in time, you can replace him with your love for me."

"Maybe." Sarah allowed Richard to put his arms around her. "Tonight I saw what he's really like, but I still love him. Perhaps in time I will forget him and come to love you."

"Stay with me awhile longer and let me show you what your life could be like."

"I'll try, Richard. I'll try."

Hidden in the garden close to where Sarah sat with Richard, a listener crept away. Out of hearing he cursed himself for his stupidity and kicked at the stones in the pathway. William had heard Sarah's words and seen her tears. After William had walked away ignoring Sarah he felt extremely ashamed of himself for treating her so badly. He watched her hasty exit into the garden and followed to apologize for his behaviour. He had been too late, Richard had reached her first. He swore again and punched the stone wall behind him. His hand ached from the contact. How stupid he had been to think she really hated him. Now he wished he could tell her how

wrong he had been and that he could easily come to love her. Tomorrow he would write her a letter and apologize and ask for her forgiveness. William went back to the reception and poured himself a glass of whiskey.

When William awoke in the late afternoon he composed a letter and wrote Sarah's name on the outside. Then he looked for his Aunt Edith to ask her to give it to Sarah.

"Sarah's gone, William. She left with that painter. I can send the letter to her. Elizabeth will have her address."

"Sure, do that," William answered, dejected. He had poured out his feelings to Sarah and now she was gone, gone with the artist. Was it too late to undo the damage he had done with his stupidity?

Seventeen

During the second year that Sarah lived with Richard Beacon and his mother, he tried to make Sarah forget William. She could see that Richard was the perfect suitor. They spent the days together as he helped her improve her bird drawings.

As Richard watched her work on a sketch, he wanted to reach out and pull her into his arms. It was agony for him to be with her, to love her and not be able to have her love in return. He sent daily bouquets of flowers to her room accompanied by notes from him. *Sarah, you are the fairest flower in my garden and I revel in your fragrant beauty.*

Sarah was embarrassed as she read each note with the flowers. She knew it was time to leave but where would she go. The thought of going home and living with Jo Anna depressed her. Richard would make a kind, loving husband but he was not William. Sometimes she was angry with herself for loving William and tried hard to see Richard as her husband. Finally guilt made her confront Richard.

Richard was waiting for Sarah in the parlor where they shared a morning meal. He noticed her discomfort as she hesitated before entering the room, her eyes shadowed from lack of sleep, as she stood near him.

"Richard. Thank you for all the flowers and your notes. I'm trying to forget William but I don't seem to be able to. You would make a wonderful husband but I don't love you in that way. You are my best friend and that's all it can ever be." Sarah turned to walk away as tears filled her eyes.

Richard stood up and knocked over his chair in haste to keep her from leaving. "Sarah, can't you see how foolish this is. William doesn't, nor will he ever love you. I can live without your love but I can't live without you. Marry me and I will never hurt you the way he has."

Richard took hold of Sarah's hand then pulled her into his arms. "We could have a good life together, Sarah. I love you so much."

"No, Richard. I can't marry you." Sarah struggled to free herself from him but he pushed her toward the settee, then down onto the seat. He began caressing her breasts while smothering her face with kisses.

"I can't love you, Richard, and not this way."

"You will love me, Sarah, and now we must marry."

"No, Richard. Don't do this to me." Richard sat up and released Sarah.

"I'm sorry, Sarah. I love you so much. It's been hard to have you with me and not be able to have you as my wife. Can't you see that?"

"Richard, I'm sorry but that can never be." Sarah struggled out from under Richard and ran to the door. She pulled it open and almost knocked Richard's mother to the floor. Richard followed her and in front of his mother's astonished eyes, pulled Sarah roughly into his arms.

"Richard, let her go," his mother scolded. "I've known for a long time that Sarah would never marry you. Now let her go before you brand her as a common tart. There's enough gossip already about you two. Sarah, it's time you went home."

"Forgive me, Sarah." Richard stumbled out of the room and left the house. He couldn't watch Sarah leave him.

Unknown to her, during the past year, Richard had intercepted letters to Sarah. He noticed that a male hand had written her name on the letter and he guessed who it was from. When he opened the

letter and read its contents, he had hastily closed it and resealed it. There was a return address inside the letter.

"Please return this letter," he instructed his servant who had brought the letter to him. "If there are any more like these, refuse to accept them."

"Yes, sir," the man replied taking the letter from Richard. He gave the letter to another servant who put it with the outgoing letters from Mrs. Beacon.

Three years had passed since Elizabeth's wedding. She was now the mother of three girls. Sarah had written to her a year ago about leaving Richard's home and going back to live with her father and Jo Anna. This was the last letter Sarah wrote to her before she returned home to her father and Jo Anna.

"Sarah, it's good to have you back," Matthew said hugging her tightly. "I've missed my eldest daughter."

"Thank you, Father," Sarah said formally as she stared at Jo Anna who smiled with her face but not her eyes.

"You look unwell. Were you ill and that's why you've come home?

"No, Father. It was just time to come home."

"Welcome back," Jo Anna said kissing her cheek. "Rose will be glad to see you after all this time. She'll be going back to school soon so enjoy your time with her."

Rose and Harry appeared and Sarah was surprised at the changes in both of them. Rose was an attractive young lady of fourteen. Her long curls were neatly combed around her shoulders and her patterned dress showed the beginnings of a shapely form. She did not rush to Sarah as she once did, but walked demurely toward her.

"Sarah, you've finally come home."

"Yes, Rose, and you've grown up."

"I couldn't stay a child forever. Are you home to stay or just for a visit?"

"I'm home to stay. My lessons with Richard are over."

"Hello, Sarah," Harry said. He stared at her pale face, and saw the sadness in her eyes with dark shadows beneath them.

"Hello, Harry. How are my birds doing?"

"I don't get much chance to go out to the stables these days. Your father keeps me busy learning his trade."

Harry was completely changed. He was no longer the stableboy in stained clothing. Now he looked like a young gentleman on his way up in the world. He still loved Sarah as much as before but had heard of her love for William from Elizabeth. He knew she would never be his. Rose had become the close friend that Sarah once was.

Sarah's life at home became a dreary routine. She was very unhappy and refused to tell either Rose or her father about the real reason she had come home. Most often she spent her days working haphazardly at her drawings which were never as good as she could do. She was never pleased with them and constantly destroyed her work.

"Sarah, what's wrong with you?" Rose asked. "You never smile or laugh anymore. Did Richard do something to you? I thought you would've married him."

"No, Richard was always kind to me. It was just time to come home."

"Well, you don't look like you're glad to be home. You hardly spend time with me and I'll be going back to school soon. Then you'll be alone except for Father. Jo Anna will make life even more miserable for you."

"Then I'll just stay out of her way."

"Won't you ever get married?"

"Probably not."

"Harry would make you a good husband."

"Harry's only a friend."

"Is that all he is to you? You used to be so close."

"We've both grown up."

"Then I'll marry, Harry." Rose stomped out of Sarah's bedroom to find Harry who was working with Matthew.

"Harry," Rose cried, "I don't know what to do about Sarah. She's so unhappy and she won't let me help her."

"We've all tried to make her happy, Rose. Only Sarah can help herself." Harry shared a worried look with Matthew who sighed deeply in concern for his eldest daughter.

William Cantwell continued writing to Sarah at Richard's home. He did not know that she had left two years ago. He no longer sought out female company as they couldn't compete with his vision of Sarah. His studies occupied most of his time, and he did not drink and party as much as before. Edward Farnsworth, his closest friend, soon tired of his dull company and found others to spend time with. William's studious behaviour earned him honours and he stood first in his class. He kept the unopened letters to Sarah tied in ribbon beneath his pillow. When he wasn't studying he held them in his hands, miserable at the thought that she wouldn't even open them. She must be married to Richard by now. With the school term in recess for a holiday, William went to visit his aunt. He took the letters with him and decided to destroy them.

Elizabeth, Jack and their three daughters were visiting her aunt and uncle when William arrived. He was sitting on the bed in one of the guest rooms when Elizabeth burst into the room. The letters to Sarah were in his hands one last time before he burned them in the fireplace.

"William," Elizabeth cried throwing herself into his arms, "I'm so pleased to see you after all these years."

"Should a married lady be throwing herself at a bachelor?"

"Don't be silly. You're family. What are those letters you're holding?"

"Nothing. Just some letters I was going to get rid of."

"But you looked so unhappy. Are they letters to a lady?"

"Yes. But it's hopeless. She's probably married now and that's why she's returned my letters."

"Did Sarah ever reply to the letter you sent?"

"No. She returned it unopened."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Are those more letters to Sarah?"

"Yes," William answered sadly. "I kept writing to her at Richard's home but she keeps sending them back."

"Sarah went home to live with her father about two years ago."

"Two years ago! Didn't she marry Richard?"

"No, silly. Sarah couldn't marry Richard because she still loves you. She's been pining away for you for years. Rose writes to me and they are so worried about her."

"She's been home for two years. Why didn't you tell me?

"I thought Sarah would have written to you and told you."

"She wouldn't write to me, not after the way I treated her at your wedding."

"You were very rude to her. You should have gone to Richard's home and apologized in person."

"I know, I know, but I was too ashamed of my behaviour. What should I do now?"

"Give me those letters and I will write to Sarah."

"Would you? Maybe it's not too late. All those wasted years!"

"Sarah's been ill. I'll invite her to visit Jack and me in London next month. Then you can come and meet her there. Let me give these letters to her before you visit, to make it easier on both of you."

"Elizabeth, you're adorable!" William picked up his dainty cousin, swung her in the air and kissed solidly on the cheek.

"Hey! What's this," an angry Jack demanded staring at his wife whirling around in another man's arms.

William laughed and lowered Elizabeth gently to the ground. "Congratulate me, Jack. My misery shall soon disappear."

"Darling," Elizabeth soothed linking her arm with his. "William was just happy to hear the news that Sarah is not married to Richard."

"I didn't know he cared the way he treated her at our wedding."

William wrote one more letter to Sarah, a rambling missive of apology and his love for her. Then he gave it to Elizabeth who wrote an invitation to Sarah to visit. She took all of William's letters home with her.

Rose and Harry entered the house after their early morning ride together. A rider on a tired horse was delivering a letter. Rose took it from him and showed it to Harry.

"That looks like Elizabeth's writing. She's visiting her aunt. I hope everything is well. Why wouldn't she send it with the regular delivery? It's addressed to Sarah. She hasn't written to her in a long time."

"Well, let's take it up to Sarah and find out."

Rose hurried up the stairs to Sarah's room. Sarah had been ill and spent most of her days there, even eating meals in her room. She spent her days staring out the window, watching the birds, listening to their joyful chirping which seemed to depress her even more. Matthew tried to get her to ride with Rose and Harry but Sarah refused, preferred being alone.

"Sarah, there's a letter for you from Elizabeth."

Sarah looked listless with dark shadows under her eyes from another sleepless night. Her hair hung limply over her shoulders and she was still dressed in a nightgown and robe. A breakfast tray sat on the table beside her, the cold food uneaten and unappealing.

"I'll read it later," Sarah said, as she pushed the tray away from her sight.

"She hasn't written to you in a long time. It must be something important. Read it now. I'm curious to know what she says."

"Then you open it and read it." Rose opened the letter and read it to Sarah.

"Dear Sarah. I've heard you've been ill and hoped you would come and visit us in London. You've never seen my daughters and they would love to meet you. It's been so long since we've visited and I miss you. Jack will be away for awhile and it'll be lonely without him. Come and keep me company just like in the old days when we were girls. We could pretend we're still girls. I've seen William and I have some surprising news for you about him. Please come and visit."

"No, I don't want to go. She's probably going to tell me that William is getting married. I don't want to hear about him."

"Does it matter if William is getting married? I thought you disliked him. It might make you forget what it was that happened with Richard."

"No, it will only open old wounds."

"Is William the reason you didn't marry Richard?"

Sarah stared out the window at the warm, sunny day. The birds flitted around the ivy as they fed new babies and chirped happy songs. She thought of William marrying and decided to remain an old maid if she couldn't marry the man she loved. Tears filled her already swollen eyes and she wiped them away.

"Sarah, go for a visit with Elizabeth. You can't cry forever over William. I'll never let a man treat me like he's treated you."

"I hope the one you love will love you in return," Sarah said and smiled. "It's too late for me."

"Can I come with you? I can leave for school from Elizabeth's."

"You really want me to go? It's hard to see her so happy when I'm not."

"Let's go. Maybe Elizabeth will make you feel better."

"All right, we'll go. It's time to stop crying and make what I can of my life."

"Write to Elizabeth today and tell her. We can send someone with the letter right away."

"I'm sorry I've been so miserable. I'll try and make up for it."

"We've been worried about," Rose said, hugging her sister. "Father will be glad to see you getting better."

Sarah washed her hair and got dressed. She sat down at her writing desk and smiled as she wrote the letter to Elizabeth. Maybe Elizabeth's happiness would help her accept what she had lost.

"Dear Elizabeth. I have been ill and perhaps visiting you after all these years will help. Rose will accompany me and stay until it is time for her to return to school. Rose wants me to send this letter immediately, so I will keep it short until we can talk face to face. You've been such a good friend and I miss our times together. Until we meet, I remain, your sister in friendship. Sarah."

She sealed the letter and wondered about William. What kind of woman would he marry, one of the society girls he had been carrying on with?

It was a long, tiring, muddy journey in a jolting carriage to Elizabeth's home in London. Sarah and Rose felt bruised and dirty as they climbed down in at the door of their destination. Elizabeth had seen the carriage and eagerly opened the door.

"Sarah," she cried as Sarah walked stiffly toward her. Elizabeth wrapped her arms around her friend and hugged her tightly. She was surprised at how thin Sarah felt. Rose stood quietly beside them, then Elizabeth hugged her marveling at how changed and lady-like she was.

"Come in, come in. You can freshen up before you meet my babies."

Sarah and Rose were shown to a cozy guest room where a blazing fire warmed the spring dampness. A servant carried their bags in and showed them where the wash bowl and hot water was waiting. They washed and changed their dusty clothes then went down to see Elizabeth's babies.

The nursery was noisy as Sarah and Rose entered. Elizabeth was trying to quiet a screaming baby by getting her to drink from a bottle. Two young girls, one almost three and the other two years old, sat at a small table. They wore frilled dresses and their hair was tied back with large bows.

"The baby is Martha, the one in yellow is Grace and the other is Beth, short for Elizabeth."

"Hello," Rose said to the two girls. "What are you playing?"

"I'm drawing," Beth, the almost three year old said.

"Rose, could you stay with the girls," Elizabeth asked handing the baby to the nanny, "I have to talk to Sarah."

"Of course," Rose answered as she smiled knowingly at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth led Sarah into her sitting room. "Sit down, Sarah. I have something for you from William."

"From William for me?"

"Something that was held back from you for a long time." Elizabeth opened her writing desk and took out the letters. She handed them to Sarah who was sitting in a wingback chair.

"William wrote to you but his letters were returned."

"I never received any letters from him."

"He didn't know you had gone home. He thought you must have married Richard."

"He sent them to Richard's home?"

"That's where the letters are addressed."

"Richard must have sent them back. Richard wanted to marry me but I couldn't."

"Do you still care for William?"

"That's why I couldn't marry Richard."

"He wrote to you after our wedding to apologize for his rude behaviour. Did you ever get that one?"

"No, nothing from him."

"Read his letters, Sarah. William loves you and is extremely sorry for the way he treated you."

Sarah took the letters and stared at them in dismay. How could Richard be so cruel? She undid the ribbon and opened the first letter, realizing that the seal had already been broken. Richard had read the letter. Anger and hope pierced the deep sadness that Sarah had carried for three long years.

Elizabeth left the room relived that it wasn't Sarah who had sent the letters back. She went back to the nursery to tell Rose about the letters.

"Dearest Sarah, I heard you in the garden expressing your love for me and I am ashamed that I treated you so horribly. Can you ever forgive me? At that moment I realized that I have loved you for a long time. I deserve all your loathing for causing you such pain. Please forgive me. I will understand if you never want to see me ever again. I plead for your forgiveness. Let me regain my favour with you by professing my deepest love. I kneel before you in absolute submission for your punishment of my rude behaviour. Please, I beg of you, forgive me and let me atone for my boorishness. Let me see you and repair the damage I have foolishly done.

Your repentant lover, William Cantwell.

Sarah held the letter to her heart as tears of happiness fell from her eyes. She was filled with a shy wonder that her suffering was all for nothing. William loved her.

Eighteen

Sarah sat stiffly on the hard sofa, her hands clenched tightly on her lap. Her face was filled with fear as she breathed heavily. Her deep rose-hued dress, with a scooped neckline, fluttered as she tried to control her panic. Around her neck she wore a natural pearl necklace which had been borrowed from Elizabeth. Dark ringlets shivered around her shoulders as she quivered in anticipation of this meeting she had never expected to happen. She looked at the bundle of letters beside her on the sofa but was afraid to touch them. She didn't need to read them again, the words were burned into her memory. Were these letters really true or were they just something to taunt her affections then break her heart? Her strained nerves heard every sound but the one she wanted. At twenty-three years of age she was anxious that this meeting go well or she would be lonely for the rest of her life. The parlour door opened slowly and William stepped into the room.

Sarah looked up into his expressionless face, then down at her hands. She was pleased that her memory of him was just the same as he looked now, handsome as she remembered, although older.

William stared at the woman who had haunted his thoughts for many years, smiled, then silently closed the door behind him. Sarah was more beautiful than he remembered. He leaned against the door unsure of what to say or how to break the heavy silence between them. Then a mischievous smile crossed his face and he walked toward her.

"May I have this dance, sweet lady," William said, in a serious tone. Sarah looked up in surprise.

"Dance?" she said. "There's no music playing."

"Can't you hear the music playing, the bells ringing with joy as love fills the room," William recited as if his words were from a stanza of poetry.

Sarah smiled. "Ah sweet love, at last I have found you."

William gently took Sarah's cold hands in his and kissed her fingertips. Sarah blushed and allowed herself to be drawn into his arms. In time to swaying waltz music that only they could hear, Sarah and William danced around the room.

"My world is a beautiful woman," William whispered into her ear. "A woman I must have for my wife. Will you marry me, Sarah?"

"Do you really mean that?"

"Every word and all that I wrote in my letters."

Sarah could not find the words to say, as tears threatened to fall from her eyes, tears that William saw as she gazed up at him.

He suddenly stopped dancing and moved away from her. William became angry and wondered why she couldn't answer him immediately.

"Or are you already someone else's wife in all but name?" William accused.

"What are you suggesting?" Sarah replied, her shyness lost, her eyes teary but sparkling with anger.

"That the years you spent with that painter, you were not just his student!"

"How dare you accuse me of that. There's never been anything between us except that of a student and teacher."

"That's not what the gossips say. I ask you to marry me and you hesitate. Elizabeth tells me that you've been pining for me. Your own words in the garden were that you loved me."

"Why you arrogant, conceited boor. You think after the way you treated me, that I'd fall into your arms the moment you smiled at

me. How dare you think that I'd offer myself to the first man that showed an interest. I wasted all those years crying over you, when I could have married a real gentleman."

Sarah stared at the bundle of letters on the sofa. She picked them up and stood in front of the blazing fire.

"Don't, Sarah, don't do it." William grabbed the hand that held the letters. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean what I said. We've wasted enough time now."

Sarah's anger did not diminish with his pleading words. Her cold eyes stared at William. She pulled her hand free from his and threw the letters on the floor. He bent down and picked up the bundle, then held them out to her.

"Sarah, take them, they're yours. They hold my heart."

Sarah's anger cooled as the memory of William's arms around her reminded her of how long she had wanted him to hold her. Staring into his penitent face, she took the letters then smiled.

"Oh Sarah," he cried as he pulled her into his arms, "I'll never make you angry again. Say you love me."

"I do love you William, and I will marry you."

The letters fell from Sarah's hand as William kissed her passionately. Four years of unhappiness were quickly forgotten as well as their first quarrel.

The parlour door opened a crack and prying eyes peered into the room. Rose and Elizabeth smiled widely at one another as they planned the upcoming wedding.

"Ahem," coughed the housekeeper as she pushed a tea cart of dainty cakes and tea cups, "It is time to serve this now."

"Give them a few more minutes," Elizabeth giggled, like a schoolgirl. "This has been a long time coming. We'll serve it."

"Madam, I should serve it." The housekeeper shrugged as Elizabeth took the cart from her. "What's this world coming to with unchaperoned young ladies?"

Knocking loudly, Elizabeth pushed the parlour door open and wheeled the tea cart into the room. Sarah blushed, embarrassed, and tried to break free of William's embrace.

"Ah my sweet. Let them see us," William said as he smiled happily at her. "It is only my scheming cousin that can't give us a moment alone so she will have to see what we are up to." He held tight to Sarah and kissed her passionately again.

"You two had better get married as quickly as possible," Elizabeth said winking at Rose who had followed her into the room. "Then you won't have to put up with chaperones."

"That we will my dear cousin, that we will. Doesn't Sarah blush beautifully?"

In the seven months before their wedding Sarah and William became well acquainted with each other. William learned how stubborn Sarah could be and learned how to keep his temper at her willfulness. Sarah learned how to avoid making him angry while still getting her own way. William returned to Oxford to continue his studies. Sarah and Rose went with him but stayed in a nearby hotel. Her father sent an elderly servant to serve them and chaperone Sarah with William. They were never allowed to be alone together to fuel the stories spread by the gossips of Sarah's previous alliance.

The elderly servant sat rocking in her chair, knitting needles clicking while Rose tried to read. Sarah and William sat on a sofa, her skirt spread over their joined hands.

"You are keeping well, my love?" William enquired as he glanced around the room at the chaperones.

"Yes, very well. And how are your studies coming?"

"I find them rather boring as I can only think of you and our marriage."

"Rose has me rushing here and there with plans for our wedding, and finding the right material for my wedding dress."

"Soon, my darling, we will be together as we were meant to be."

"I long for the day we can be together," Sarah whispered as she leaned against William.

"And I with you," William said softly his face against the pale skin of her soft neck.

Knitting needles suddenly stopped clicking as the elderly servant stared fiercely at the couple on the sofa. Rose looked up from her book and wished that she could find a love like Sarah had.

"I must leave you now, my sweet. Until we meet again my love."

"I shall miss you until then," Sarah said sadly as William stood up. He had left a folded note in her hand.

After William had gone Sarah sighed and put her hand to her head as if she had a headache. She quickly read the note then stuffed it into her sleeve.

"The hour is late," the elderly servant said, "and my weary bones need rest. You young ladies need to retire and keep your beauty about you. Off you go now, off to bed."

"Goodnight," Sarah and Rose said as they retired to their rooms.

Sarah undressed slowly then pulled out an old dark dress. She pulled it on and threw a shawl around her shoulders and over her head. She blew out her candle and waited until she heard snores from the old servant's room. It was quiet in Rose's room as Sarah tiptoed past and out the door. She hurried down the steps to the main room of the inn looking around her. No one seemed to be there as she pulled open the heavy wooden door. She didn't notice the night watchman who saw her tiptoe out. A dark shadow approached Sarah and she threw herself into his arms.

The night watchman shook his head at the antics of the young lady. His wife stood beside him and muttered about the goings on of a proper young lady.

"You really came," William whispered as he led her away from the inn.

"Did you think I wouldn't?"

"I never know with you. Come, let's get out of this dampness and see what happiness we can find."

"I'm always happy with you, William. We are to be married."

"Then we won't have to sneak around. I've waited so long to have you. Are you afraid?"

"A little, but I love you so, William."

William's semester was finished and he spent his time with Sarah, always with the chaperone and Rose. They looked for a place to live.

"This place is enormous, William. We don't need all this room."

"Of course we do, my sweet. We'll need room for the servants and guests and soon the children."

"But can't we just buy a small house to start then move when we need the space?"

"I don't like all the turmoil of moving from place to place. I want to stay in town and this place is perfect for an up and coming barrister."

"Will we have a house in the country?"

"I'm tired of country living. I lived away from town most of my life and I'm not the type to be a country gentleman."

"But I like living away from town. It's crowded and smelly. Why can't we have two small places?"

"Because I like this large house and this is where we'll live."

"Well, then you can live here alone." Sarah stomped off back to the carriage and an angry William followed her.

There were many quarrels between them but they were always quickly resolved by compromise and their strong love. William convinced Sarah about the need for a large house in town and she convinced him that they needed a place away from town in the heat of the summer especially for the children.

Matthew arrived a few weeks before the wedding to take his daughters home. He was sad to lose Sarah who looked so much like her mother.

"Well, daughter, are you ready to visit your home for the last time?

"Oh, Father. I shall always come to visit, but Ashton Hall will never be my home."

"As long as you come to visit your poor old father."

"Always," Sarah said, hugging him.

"Rose will miss you, too," Matthew said as he smiled at his younger daughter.

"I wish I could live with you, Sarah. It'll be hard to be alone with Jo Anna."

"She tries her best, Rose," Matthew said. "I don't understand why you don't like her."

"She doesn't like us. We remind her of Mother."

"Soon you'll find your own love," Sarah said to Rose. "It won't be long before you have a home of your own."

"I guess so," Rose said sadly. She thought of the one she wished would be her own true love.

Jo Anna welcomed them home and kissed Sarah and Rose. "How nice to see you both back," she said linking her arms with them. "The house has been cleaned from top to bottom and ready for your wedding, Sarah."

"Thank you, Jo Anna."

"Now come, your rooms are ready."

After a restless night Rose went for an early morning ride. She loved the dewy morning and breathed in the clean air. School was finished and she was to live at home with her father and Jo Anna. As she rode back from her ride she saw Harry watching her. His face stared unhappily at her. She suddenly realized why he had not

paid more attention to her than to a good friend. Harry turned from her and stared at Sarah who had come to get her sister for breakfast. Sarah waved and Harry's face was bleaker looking than before. Harry loved Sarah and was unhappy about her marriage.

"Harry," Rose called. He ignored her and walked away without replying. Rose looked at her sister then jerked her horse away from the stables and back to the road. At that moment she couldn't face Sarah who had what she wanted.

"Rose, what's wrong?" Sarah had not seen Harry walk away.

In September, three weeks before Sarah's wedding, Elizabeth arrived with her children. Her husband was unable to attend because of his military commitment. She noticed Rose's lack of excitement about Sarah's wedding but thought it was just due to the tiring preparations. Sarah was happy to see Elizabeth and dragged her away to talk about the wedding, excluding Rose.

"Is something wrong with Rose," Elizabeth enquired.

"I'm not sure. She won't talk to me about what's wrong but I know she's unhappy. It's probably because she'll be left here with Jo Anna."

William, his father and two brothers arrived the first week of October. His mother was too ill to attend, mainly because her cherished son was soon to have a wife that she didn't approve of.

A full moon shone as two shadowed figures crept out from Ashton Hall. It was a warm October evening and the smell of roses in the garden was heady for the lovers who hardly noticed.

"I am so tired of chaperones," Sarah complained. William laughed.

"That's no way for a lady to talk," William teased taking her into his arms.

"And you're no gentleman," Sarah replied in mock anger. "I'm a ruined woman."

"I love ruined women, especially this one that fills my arms."

"Now you have to marry me," Sarah laughed between kisses. "Or your name will be forever scorned."

"Ah my lady love, I will protect your reputation by becoming your husband."

"And I my love, shall give you pleasure."

The sky clouded as rain fell in a fine mist over Ashton Hall the morning of Sarah and William's wedding. Then as if wanting to bless the marriage, the sun breached through and shone in glory over the countryside.

"Are you nervous," Elizabeth asked as she brushed Sarah's long dark hair, then twirled it into a loop at the back of her head.

"No. I'll be glad when we are alone. No more chaperones."

"You're a wanton woman," Elizabeth laughed as she remembered her own wedding day and wayward behaviour before she became a married lady, which resulted in the early birth of their first daughter. "Rose will miss you dearly."

"Yes, she'll be here with Jo Anna and Father. Jo Anna will try her best to please Father by being nice to Rose. William and I must invite her to visit us often and perhaps Rose will meet someone to marry."

"I hope that will happen for her. We're both happy with our choice of a husband. Perhaps Rose will be as lucky."

A flute played as Sarah walked toward William standing beside the minister. Her cream coloured dress swished around her over the flower petals dropped by one of Elizabeth's young daughters. Sarah's face blazed with happiness and William was transfixed by the love he saw in her eyes. Matthew handed his daughter to William who gently took her hand. Together they faced the minister who uttered the words that united them as man and wife. Jo Anna smiled

happily up at Matthew as he held her hand. Only one more daughter to get rid of.

Rose watched for Harry but he did not appear at the wedding. She was devastated by his absence and longed hopelessly for his love. He had disappeared without word to anyone as to where he was going.

Nineteen

Marriage for Sarah and William was never dull. They had moved into the large house owned by his aunt and uncle in Oxford. It was a narrow three story house near the university that William had lived in when his aunt and uncle came to visit. Sarah enjoyed having her own home to run and relished the freedom of doing what she wanted without anyone chastising her for the way she liked to do things. They brought a housekeeper and a cook from William's childhood home, staff that did the daily chores. This gave Sarah time to resume her drawings. There was a garden attached to the house with mature trees that attracted the birds that Sarah drew.

Sarah and William were often involved in a heated discussion about all the time he spent on his studies.

"You should spend more time with me," Sarah commented icily.

"You knew that I have to finish my education," William countered coldly, "or did you think I would just give up everything to be a husband."

"Well, at least you could spend more time with me. You don't have to study night and day."

"Nights I give you everything," William said, "isn't that enough?"

"I just miss you, and sometimes I'm so bored with only the servants to talk to."

"It won't be long now, a few more months. I'll try and keep some evening free for you."

"Oh how nice of you. I guess I'll have to find a freer gentleman to spend my evenings with."

"Don't be so silly, Sarah. Isn't drawing taking up most of your time?"

"Oh, William, I just miss you."

"Darling, I know it's hard getting used to being married. I don't know what a husband is supposed to do. We'll just have to learn as we go along. There will be lots of time after my schooling is finished. Now come here and prove that you love me."

"I won't!"

William jumped up and grabbed Sarah around the waist. She resisted and fought him off but couldn't get him to let go. Finally she sighed and laughed as he covered her face with ardent kisses.

"You rogue, you know I can't resist you," Sarah whispered into his ear.

There were many arguments about other things as both were stubborn and used to getting their own way but the anger never lasted very long.

Often in the morning after an argument, Sarah discovered a single red rose beside her on the pillow. William was always up early and left her sleeping as he continued his law studies. Another time Sarah discovered a jeweled bird brooch on her dressing table. The days were sometimes lonely for Sarah with William studying at university, days when she wanted to do other things besides drawing her birds. On these days she went out with one of the maids they had hired, and they shopped in the market or shops that interested them. Sarah was fascinated by the historic buildings that were part of the university and loved to sit and watch the throngs of students hurrying across the square. Sometimes she even saw William who never noticed her as he scurried from class to class.

Most evenings Sarah waited up for William to complete his studies at home after dinner. Then they retired to their bedroom, and finally alone, made love as they shared themselves with each other.

Sarah couldn't believe how wonderful it was to be so much in love and be loved in return.

William was a gentle lover who ensured that Sarah enjoyed their lovemaking. He was awed that she could love him so much and was not afraid of lying with him as he had been told that wives endured rather than enjoyed.

Six months after their wedding a letter came from Sarah's sister Rose. Sarah had had a bad morning of feeling ill and listless. She went out into the garden, into the pale sunlight and read the letter.

Dearest Sarah, the letter began. I miss you and wish you hadn't got married. It's so lonely here with just Jo Anna to talk to. Papa and Harry are always away so there's no one here but her. She would like to send me away somewhere to get rid of me. She doesn't like me talking to the staff or helping them like we used to at home. I sometimes wish I could go home but someone else is living there now. When are you coming to visit like you said you would? Can I come and visit with you? Please, please let me come – I can't stand this house. Your loving sister, Rose.

Sarah sat in the garden watching the birds flit about caring for their new babies. Bees buzzed around the flowers that were just starting to open. The sun made her feel wearier and the bit of breakfast she had eaten churned in her stomach. Sarah pulled herself off the bench and went into her sitting room.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Madam," the housekeeper Elsa enquired as Sarah's face looked pasty and ill.

"Perhaps that would help," Sarah replied as she pulled out a sheet of monogrammed paper. Dipping her pen into the ink Sarah answered the letter from her sister.

"Dearest Rose, I miss you too. Of course you can come and visit us. William is always studying so sometimes I am lonely. It would be good to have you here. Come as soon as

you can. I'm not feeling well at this moment, and perhaps it's because I need someone to take my mind off the long days with William not around. Come soon. Your anxious sister, Sarah."

The housekeeper placed the tray of tea and cakes beside Sarah. Sarah looked at the cakes and felt very ill at the thought of eating them.

"Please take those away. I can't bear the thought of eating them."

The housekeeper smiled knowlingly and removed the plate of cakes. "It will pass, Madam," she said, "the first months are always bad."

"What do you mean?"

"Your morning illness indicates that perhaps you are carrying a child."

"A child! I can't be!"

"Would you like me to have the physician come and see you in case it is something else?"

"Do you think I should?'

"It's always wise, Madam."

"A child, I could be carrying a child." Suddenly Sarah was frightened. Bearing a child had killed her mother. She added a note in the letter to Rose.

"Rose, please come soon. I think I am carrying a child and I'm frightened."

Sarah folded the letter and warmed the wax. Then she picked up the family crest and pressed it against the wax to seal the letter.

"Oh, Rose, come soon," she said as she arose and put the letter on the tray for sending.

Sarah was asleep when a weary William climbed the stairs to their bedroom. He was surprised that Sarah wasn't waiting for him as she usually did. He shed his clothes and climbed under the warm comforter beside his sleeping wife. Tenderly he kissed her smooth

cheek then promptly fell asleep. In the morning he was up and dressed before Sarah was awake. As he bent over to kiss her cheek she stirred and opened her eyes.

"Darling, please come home early today. I have something to tell you."

"I'll try, dearest, I'll try," William said, "but today is a court day and I don't know how long that will be."

"Please, William."

"I'll try dear."

Sarah drifted back to sleep but was woken by the housekeeper bringing her morning tea and scones.

"How are you this morning, Madam?"

Sarah stretched and felt like her old self. "I feel hungry today," Sarah said sitting up. "Perhaps I can eat some breakfast this morning. Is the physician coming today?"

"Yes, Madam. He'll be here very shortly."

"Then I had better get up and dress. Do you have any children, Elsa?"

"No, Madam. I never married. It was enough trouble looking after Master William and his brothers. After them I never wanted children."

"My mother died birthing my sister Rose."

"Don't worry, Madam. You are healthy and should have no trouble."

"I hope so, Elsa, I hope so."

The cook prepared a special meal as Sarah requested, William's favourite dishes. Spiced ham and roasted lamb were the main dishes. Dessert was a hot custard pudding with sweet sauce and William's favoured wine. The table was spread with the best china and silverware and shone beneath candlelight. Sarah was pleased with the effect and waited for him to return.

William was later than usual and dragged himself into the room. He kissed Sarah on the cheek instead of the embracing her ardently. He was very tired and the court case still weighed on his mind. A young child had been caught stealing an apple and was sentenced to expulsion overseas. William felt this was too severe but that was the law of the land. He hardly noticed the dinner or the best dishes and picked at his meal instead of eating it.

Sarah was angry and upset that he didn't pay her more attention or the trouble she had gone to with arranging for this dinner.

"William," Sarah shouted, finally getting his attention. "I've been trying to talk to you for the last hour and you haven't heard a thing I've said."

"Sorry, my dear. What were you saying."

"Oh nothing important," Sarah replied flinging her napkin onto the table and arising from her chair.

"Oh, that's good. It was an upsetting day."

"Well I've had an upsetting day, too. Much that you care."

"Well, go to bed and tomorrow will be better."

"I'll just do that," Sarah stormed as tears streamed from her eyes.

"I'll see you later then. I have to finish my studying."

"Do that, then. I might as well go home to my father for all the attention you pay me."

"That'll be the day. He's hardly ever home," William scoffed beginning to get angry. Couldn't she understand that a husband had other things to think about besides a wife.

"At least I'll have Rose to talk to." Sarah suddenly felt ill after the bit of supper she had eaten. William saw her face pale and suddenly realized that was not normal.

"Are you okay?" he asked getting up from the table and approaching her.

"I wanted this night to be special. I had cook prepare all your favourite foods. And you ruined my surprise."

"I'm sorry, dearest. I am just upset about the court case today. What is it that you wanted to tell me." William put his arms around Sarah but she pulled away.

"Don't William, I may be sick on you." He stepped back and looked worridly at her.

"Has the physician been here."

"Yes, he was here today. Elsa called him." Sarah suddenly smiled up at William who was mystified at her sudden change in attitude. "Would you like to hear what he had to say?"

"Of course. I hope it's not a serious illness. You look rather pale."

"I am ill, darling, but it will only last for nine months."

"Nine months?"

"Silly, I am going to have a baby!"

"I'm going to be a father!"

"That's what the physician said would happen. Are you pleased?"

"Of course, darling," William said pulling her into his arms and kissing her. "A child. It has to be a son."

"And what if it's not?"

"Then we'll just have to try again."

"If I survive birthing the first child. My mother died giving birth to Rose."

"You'll be all right. You have to be all right. I couldn't live without you. We'll make sure you have a good midwife. You'll be all right."

A month later Rose arrived to visit. Sarah was feeling much better in her fourth month of pregnancy and was pleased to see her sister. After the maids had unpacked Rose's clothing, she and Sarah sat in the drawing room with a tray of tea and cakes.

"Are you happy to be carrying a child," Rose asked.

"Yes, but I am scared. Mother died giving birth to you."

"From what I hear from Papa, she was always unwell. You have been healthy all your life. You will be okay."

"I'm so glad you're here, Rose. William is happy to become a father but he doesn't understand like another woman does. Elsa is a good person to talk to but you're my own sister."

"I don't know anything about it either but Elizabeth has had three babies and she is all right. Have you written and told her?"

"Not yet. I wanted to be sure everything is fine with the baby. I will write to her today and you can tell her that you are here visiting."

"Maybe she can come and visit with us."

"Perhaps," Sarah said feeling better about having a baby. Of course Elizabeth had three babies and survived them all.

Outside a shaft of sunlight pierced through the clouds and inside a load of worry was lifted from Sarah. She would have this child and love it as much as she had been loved by her mother.

The months passed as Sarah and Rose spent the days together. Sarah continued her drawings in the garden on fine days, while Rose read a book. At first Rose enjoyed being with Sarah but the days soon became boring and she was restless. William worried about his wife which interfered with his studies. He did not receive his usual high marks but did succeed with passing the term. He would be a father when it was time for his final testing.

Rose was almost fifteen and Sarah could see that she was tired of the daily routine of staying at home with her. She was very large now and preferred to stay home and draw in the garden. Sarah could see that Rose needed something more to do than just keep her company.

"Why don't you go out walking with one of the maids," Sarah suggested to Rose one morning.

"I'd rather go alone."

"It's not appropriate for a young girl to go out on her own."

"You used to go off alone."

"That was at home and only to the river to draw. Never through a town alone."

"Are you afraid that some drunken student will carry me away? A maid couldn't prevent that."

"Well, then, after the baby is born, maybe you should go home. I will be busier than ever."

"I don't want to go home. Jo Anna doesn't want me."

Rose threw down the tiny nightgown that she was stitching. She went over to the window and crouched on the padded seat. Staring at the drizzly day she sighed and longed to be doing something. There were a few people passing, riding in dripping carriages pulled by muddy horses. Rose wanted to be out there, looking for someone she knew was in town.

In the letter Matthew wrote to Rose he mentioned Harry. A few weeks after Sarah and William's wedding, Harry had returned to Ashton Hall. He had been to Oxford enquiring about architectural studies and wished to study there. Since apprenticing with Matthew, Harry had wanted to learn more of the trade. Matthew gave his consent and financial backing for Harry's studies. He was enrolled in studies at Oxford.

This was another reason Rose wanted to visit with Sarah. Rose did not tell her that Harry was in Oxford. She loved Harry, and missed him.

Sarah rested in the afternoon and Rose was supposed to do the same. She didn't need this rest and was bored with reading. Staring out the window of her bedroom, Rose thought of Harry and longed to see him. She and a maid had been driven past the address her father had given her. Rose wanted to stop and visit but it was afternoon and he would probably be in class. As well, they were on an errand for Sarah and the maid refused to accompany Rose inside the building to enquire about Harry.

"It's not appropriate for a young lady to visit a gentleman," the maid said. "We've got to get that bit of material for the child."

"But he's a friend and works for my father. I want to see him."

"Another day, Rose. You can send a note that you want to visit him."

"Couldn't we stop now and leave a note?"

"We're in a hurry. Another day. Driver, continue."

When the staff was occupied with their duties, and Sarah asleep, Rose put on a heavy, warm cloak and sneaked down the stairs to the front door. No one noticed as she quietly opened the door and stepped outside into the rain. Rose was determined to see Harry.

Rose had her monthly allowance in the cloak pocket and had dressed in one of her best outfits. She stopped at the market and purchased a ham, and some cakes. She had previously returned to Harry's residence when she had sneaked out of the house one afternoon while Sarah slept. Rose had talked to his landlady and discovered a disturbing fact. Harry studied more than he ate although the landlady prepared good meals for her boarders, all students at the university.

The tidy, chubby landlady opened the door to a wet young lady. She pulled Rose into the dry hallway and helped her remove the wet cloak.

"All alone again, and in the rain," the lady scolded then smiled as she led Rose into the large kitchen where a warm fire blazed. "Here, warm yourself. And what is all that you are carrying?"

"Things to make Harry eat."

"Ah, I see. Well, let's get to it. He'll be here before you know it."

The landlady and Rose prepared a meal for Harry and the other students. She prepared a table, set for two, in a small room kept for the visitors of her lodgers.

Rose was too young to be considered as a woman and the landlady herself would stay nearby as a chaperone in case of need. She didn't think there would be a problem with Harry as he was more interested in studies than in girls, especially one as young as Rose.

Harry entered the hallway of his rooming house and brushed the rain drops off his coat before climbing the stairs. He was hungry but had more studies to complete and would get something after the other students had eaten. At the top of the stairs his landlady stood and bared his way.

"Mr. Waters, tonight you will eat first. Now go right down the stairs and into the parlour with you."

"I have lots of work to do. Why the parlour?"

"Just do as I say, Mr. Waters, do as I say."

"Alright Mrs. Bessy. I guess I can take a few minutes to eat."

Harry pushed open the door to the parlour and was surprised to see a table set for two people. He looked back at his landlady who hustled away to the kitchen. Something was wrong, he didn't have any visitors.

Rose stood up from the chair where she had been waiting. Her light brown hair hung down around her shoulders. She wore a velvet dress, the neckline cut low exposing her neck and rounded bosom. Harry stared at her, speechless.

"Hello Harry," Rose said shyly. "I've come to visit. Mrs. Bessy has prepared a supper for us."

"Rose! How nice to see you. You've changed a lot. What are you doing here in Oxford?'

"I'm visiting with Sarah and William."

"I'm glad you came, Rose," Harry said taking her trembling hands. "I've missed you and your father."

"I've missed you too, Harry. Papa gave me your address so I could come and let him know how you are doing."

"I'm doing well, Rose. My studies are good and I'm getting decent marks. You have really changed."

"I'm not a child any more," Rose stated smoothing her dress, pulling it down lower. "I'm going to be fifteen soon. Now come and eat before everything gets cold."

"Yes, of course, Miss Rose. I shall be pleased to eat with such a lovely young lady." Harry's studies for the evening were forgotten as he gazed at the changed Rose and realized that she was no longer a child and could be a replacement for his lost Sarah.

The other students, young men who lived in the house with him, could not believe that he was dining alone with a young woman. They developed excuses to intrude on the dinner just to see what the girl looked like. She was a beauty and they were jealous of Harry's luck. Where did he find her? She looked very young, too young for him.

"So you are interested in the ladies," one student whispered as he left the room without the book he said he had left there. He smiled at Rose as he closed the door.

Rose smiled at the young man as he exited the room. She was glad Harry studied so much instead of searching out eligible young ladies. There was still a chance for her.

Sarah and William were very worried. They had questioned the staff about where Rose had gone and had they seen her leave. A messenger knocked at the door and handed them a letter. Sarah opened it quickly.

"She's with Harry," Sarah explained after reading the note. "I didn't know he was here in Oxford."

"See, I knew there was nothing to worry about. She's like you, got to go off on her own."

"Why is he here in Oxford?

"He's studying architecture. I met him on campus one day and he told me. I forgot to mention that to you. I thought he came because he's still in love with you."

"In love with me? I never thought of him that way."

"He's going to be your father's partner when he finishes."

"Well, I'm glad he's here. Now Rose won't be so bored with us old folk."

"Come, my love, we're not that old," William said pulling her into his arms. "Does this feel like I'm an old folk." He began covering her face with kisses.

"Not in front of the staff," Sarah complained, trying to pull away.

"Well then, shall we retire to more privacy?"

"Not until Rose gets back and I give her a talking to."

Rose spent several evenings a week with Harry and the other students. Harry treated her as a young lady instead of the child he knew, especially when he saw how much the other students admired her. He wished he could forget Sarah and his love for her and give it to Rose. He could see that Rose wanted this. He hoped someday he could give Rose what she wanted and that his memory of Sarah would fade.

Twenty

William's father, Robert, helped William into his black robe and white curly wig that made him look official. Sarah was very proud of William and sketched a picture of him that she later improved and framed. After many years of study at Oxford, William had achieved his goal. He easily passed his examinations and was now a barrister ready to try cases in a court.

William opened a bottle of brandy and poured the liquid into the four glasses on the side table. Rose was allowed to enjoy a celebration drink with them.

"No more professors – no more late hours of study," William said as they lifted and clinked their glasses together.

"Well, not for classes and marks," his father said, laughing. "You'll do more research and studying for court cases."

"Hopefully for clients that pay the bills."

"You'll need it to pay for your growing family."

"I sure will," William said smiling at Sarah who looked large and uncomfortable. She smiled back and patted her bulging stomach.

"The sooner, the better. I'm tired of carrying this lump." William put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her tenderly on the cheek.

"Just another month or so, darling. Then you'll have a child instead of a bulge." Everyone laughed and Rose felt left out.

Sarah had been hers all her life and she wasn't sure she wanted to share her with a demanding baby.

After the celebration dinner William and his father sat in the small study of the house. Relaxing in high-back, padded chairs, they

finished off another glass of brandy. A low fire burned in the fireplace sending out a cozy glow of warmth and camaraderie.

"I just got a high profile case that will need many hands. Are you interested in working with me?"

"What is the case, Father? We've had our differences in the past but that is behind us. I would love to work with you."

William studied his father and saw how much he had aged. Tiredness was written on his lined, jowly face. He was pleased that they had reconciled and was now the favoured son.

"It's the Hastings case. Warren Hastings, in the year 1786 was Governor General of India. He made many enemies and when he came back to England they made trouble for him. He's accused of accepting a bribe of 1,000,000 rupees from the Begams of Oudah, in return for favours. He requested that I take his case."

"Is he guilty?"

"He says he's not but it's up to the court to prove his enemies wrong."

"India. You know how I feel about India."

"The land of opportunity and Robert Clive. I thought you'd be interested. Still your hero?"

"Of course I'm interested. I'd be glad to work on this case with you."

"Well, Hastings isn't the soldier Clive, but he was a powerful influence in India. India's a bad place sometimes," Robert mused. "Too many opportunists trying to get rich. Hastings stepped on some important toes and they brought him down."

"When do we start?"

"You've got a wife to consider first. After the baby's born and you're settled into your new home, then you can begin the work. Say two months or so from now."

"Matthew found a twenty-five room manor house in Sarnesfield for us, near the courthouse where I can work on cases. Rose is coming too. She doesn't want to go home to her father and Jo Anna."

"How's Sarah feeling, worried?"

"She's dealing with the birth to come. Still I think she's very worried because her mother died when Rose was born. But she's healthy. She'll be all right – she has to be all right."

"We can only hope, son. I'm looking forward to being a grandfather. Your brothers have children out of wedlock so I don't consider them my grandchildren."

"Sarah will give you a wonderful grandchild."

Robert Cantwell drained the last drop from his glass and set it on the table beside his chair. "Time to rejoin the ladies or they'll think we've deserted them and are already at work on this case," he said.

Sarah awoke feeling strange with a sharp pain stabbing through her body. She was suddenly very afraid as it was time for the child to be born. She was alone in the bed that she usually shared with William, because he had moved out a few days ago to help her sleep better. Stretching out her arm Sarah groped for the bell pull and in her panic pulled it over and over to summon the midwife from the servants' quarters. Struggling to sit up Sarah cried out from the razor-sharp pain that tore through her. She sat on the edge of the bed, then moaning, slumped onto the floor.

The midwife heard the bell summoning her and quickly got out of bed. She pulled off her nightgown and dressed herself in a loose garment.

Other servants heard the call and rose to prepare for the birth of Sarah's first child. Silent prayers were said for her safety and the birth of a healthy baby.

The midwife knocked on Rose's bedroom door then opened the door to Sarah's room. The fluttering candle in her hand lighted the moaning figure on the floor. Calmly she lit other candles from the one in her hand, and knelt to help Sarah back into bed.

"Come, child," she said to Sarah as she helped her recline back on the bed, "you must let the baby come. Soon it will be over."

"The pain." Sarah gasped. "So much pain."

"It will pass when the baby comes. I've delivered many healthy babies and yours will be the same."

"But my mother died with Rose."

"You are not your mother, you will live and so will the child."

"Is she all right?" Rose asked staring at the writhing figure of her sister, with beads of moisture dripping from her forehead as the child pushed to be born.

"It will be awhile before the babe comes."

"I woke William."

"Well, keep him away."

Sarah screamed and Rose rushed to her side. Taking hold of her hand Rose squeezed it and prayed that both would be well. In the study William paced the floor, drops of brandy spilled from the glass in his shaking hand.

On a cloudy, gray day, mid morning, a new Cantwell was born. The child was a daughter for Sarah and William. Sarah was exhausted and her body ached with pain. She was alive and so was her first child. The midwife wrapped the red, wrinkled child, who had been washed, in a warm blanket and showed her to Sarah. She smiled at her daughter but was too tired to take her in her arms. Rose took the child and placed it on the bed beside Sarah. The baby cried vigorously and the midwife opened Sarah's gown and showed her how to feed the child. Contentedly the baby sucked at Sarah's breast. A warm feeling crept through Sarah who wished her mother could be here to see her first grandchild.

At first Rose was fiercely jealous of the child. However, as she watched mother and child at peace, she realized that this child was now part of her family and she was an aunt. What did aunts do? She wasn't much older than the child. Perhaps the child would be more

like a young sister to her than as a niece. Maybe Sarah might even let her look after the child. Slowly, Rose accepted the baby as part of their family rather than an interloper, and later doted on her every whim.

"Beautiful baby," Rose whispered, "you'll live to know your mother. I never did."

William rushed into the room and stared down at his wife and child. She had survived and so had the child. He was unsteady on his feet after many glasses of brandy and no breakfast.

"Sarah," he stuttered thickly, "you survived. I knew you would. I couldn't lose you, I love you so much."

Weakly Sarah reached out her hand and touched William's face as he bent over the bed. "We're fine. You have a daughter."

"And I still have a wife."

They named the child Ann after Sarah's grandmother. Ann thrived on the love and constant care from her admirers, her parents, her young aunt, and grandparents except for Jo Anna. Jo Anna refused to touch the child of Matthew's daughter. She was filled with unbearable jealousy because Sarah had a child which was something Jo Anna could never have.

Marriage to Matthew was not all that Jo Anna wanted it to be. She thought she could replace Nan but she was not gentle and docile like Nan. Jo Anna was a self-serving, demanding woman who could not be a mother to his two daughters. She complained that Matthew was always working and often went to social events without him.

Matthew disliked these events, the inane chatter about nothing. He had nothing in common with the gentlemen who were born wealthy, where he had to work hard to acquire his fortune. Work gave Matthew a reason to avoid Jo Anna as much as possible. They no longer shared a bedroom as Matthew said he didn't want to disturb Jo Anna when he worked through the night.

Jo Anna found other things to occupy her time and other willing bed partners.

Rose often wrote to Harry and told him about the birth of her niece, Ann. Harry replied to her letters and acceptance of Sarah's marriage made him realize that she was totally beyond his reach. He replaced Sarah with work, with Matthew who was now his partner. They traveled to various sites to build houses and other structures which occupied their hands and their disappointments.

William was also busy with his cases, especially the Hastings case. Sarah saw little of him and he saw very little of his daughter.

"She's growing up and doesn't recognize her father. You need to spend more time with us," Sarah told him one evening after dinner.

"I'm sorry, darling. There's so much that needs to be done on this case. Father can't do it all. I promise, I'll spend Sunday with you and we'll take a drive in the carriage."

"Really! That would be nice. It's almost like I don't have a husband, just a provider."

"Well," William stated firmly, "I have to prove myself. Prove that I'm not just a copy of my Father."

"That will take time. Meanwhile, I miss you and your daughter doesn't know you."

"I miss you too, darling, but I can't just toss aside work for pleasure."

"Pleasure! We're your family. We deserve some time with you."

"I'm being paid well to solve these cases."

"Well, maybe I should pay you and then we might see you more often." Sarah stomped across the study and slammed the door behind her.

William sighed in frustration, deciding whether to follow her and soothe her or continue with his work. He poured himself a glass of brandy, took a couple of sips and strode to the window. The

garden at the back of the house was flourishing with colourful flowers beneath warm sunshine. He wanted to escape but knew that was impossible. His Father was pressuring him to complete his reading and studying of the Hastings case. There were other cases he had taken on that demanded his attention. Finishing the brandy he set the empty glass on the edge of his desk. Sighing heavily again, he decided that Sarah would have to wait until later. Work insisted that he complete that first.

Rose found endless time on her hands. Sarah, herself, did everything for Ann. She was also always in a bad mood because of arguments with William and Rose kept away from her complaints. A nanny had been hired to look after Ann but found there was not much for her to do except during the night when Sarah slept.

"Sarah," Rose said, while they were walking in the garden with Ann. "You don't really need me to help you with Ann. I don't want to go home so I thought I should go to that school where you went."

"It wasn't a nice place."

"Anything is better than going home with Father and Jo Anna. She makes it so difficult and he is often away with Harry."

"I know it's difficult for you there, and here there's nothing to interest you. Are you sure you want to go to that school?"

"I'll be with girls my own age and I like to study."

"Well then, we'll see if they will accept you."

Jo Anna was pleased to hear that Rose didn't want to come home. She contacted the school and offered an extra sum for them to take Rose. They reluctantly agreed and Rose joined the other students. The matron was pleased that Rose was not like her sister but a quiet student. Rose was happy and excelled at her studies except for drawing. She also made friends and often visited their homes.

Almost sixty-three, Matthew could stop working. He was not wealthy but financially secure. However, his dissatisfaction with his marriage made him work to occupy his time. He missed his daughters and often visited Sarah and his granddaughter. Building opportunities took Harry and him to various parts of the country so he was seldom home. The strain of travel and discontent with his life wore heavily on his health. He was still a handsome man, slim, but fatigue created deep worry lines on his face.

It was early morning and Matthew stretched back in his chair. He had worked most of the night on his latest project which was spread out across his desk. Exhaustion suddenly spread through his body, a lethargic weariness that caused a dull ache to spread down his left arm. Matthew closed his eyes and decided it was time to stop and go to bed.

Wan morning light filtered through a crack in the draperies, touching the sleeping Matthew in his chair. A servant knocked on the door and entered when there was no response. She saw Matthew still asleep. The servant girl turned to leave as quietly as she could and then stopped. The master didn't seem to be breathing. Hesitantly the girl touched Matthew's shoulder and he felt cold. She rushed out of the room to call the mistress.

"Mistress, Mistress!" the girl said nervously, curtseying before Jo Anna. "There's something wrong with the master. He's not breathing."

"Where is he, girl?" Jo Anna said calmly.

"In his workroom."

"I shall be down in a moment. Go tell his manservant to call the doctor."

It was too late for the doctor. Matthew had died in his sleep. Once more Jo Anna was a widow.

Rain drizzled frigidly on the small group gathered around the open grave as the coffin was lowered. Rain drops mixed with the

tears on the faces of the mourners. Jo Anna hid her feelings behind a black veil. Rose and Sarah clung to each other's hand, William on one side of them, Harry on the other. Their faces were red from crying and their eyes still filled with tears. Neither of them stood near Jo Anna to comfort her as she didn't seem upset at her husband's death. At least the death of their father had severed them from her forever. The minister read the burial rites and threw a handful of soil on the top of the coffin. Then the diggers began their task of filling in the hole as the mourners returned to their dry coaches for the short journey to Ashton Hall.

"She didn't care," Rose moaned as she leaned against Sarah. "She couldn't replace our mother."

"Father learned that lesson. He should never have married her."

"But he was lonely," William said gently. "He thought she could fill the void that Nan left."

"But she made his life miserable instead," Sarah replied wiping away fresh tears. "Now he's with Mother and they're happy again."

Alone in her room to change her damp clothing, Jo Anna sank onto the bed. "Oh Matthew," she whispered, a few tears escaping her dry eyes, "I loved you for so long. We should have been happy. It's all her fault. You were mine from the start."

Jo Anna angrily wiped away the tears and threw her black dress to the floor. Then she composed her face and dressed in another black dress. Appearances had to be maintained.

Two days after Matthew's funeral the family gathered in the parlour to hear the reading of his will. Sarah and Rose sat together on the settee, William and Harry in separate chairs and Jo Anna sat on the best chintz chair.

The lawyer opened his case, cleared his throat and stared uncomfortably at Jo Anna. She was the picture of widowhood but a

very attractive woman. He suddenly felt sorry for her but knew she would survive.

Sarah stared at the lawyer and avoided looking at Jo Anna. She wished the will could be read in her childhood home but it was leased to another family. It was uncomfortable sitting in Jo Anna's home. The room was warmed by a blazing fire but Sarah felt cold. Comfortable chairs were grouped together with a small table in front of the lawyer. Neither Sarah, William, Rose and Harry looked at ease in their chairs.

"To my dear wife, Nan," the solicitor said looking at Jo Anna.

"What do you mean?" Jo Anna demanded. "I was his wife." She stood up and advanced on the man, her face contorted with rage. "I should get something to repay me for all the pain and agony I've been through with his two brats."

"He didn't change his will when he married you. There is nothing for you."

"That's all you deserve," Sarah said coldly. "You were never his true wife. He could never forget Mother."

"You, you....." Jo Anna rushed toward Sarah and grabbed her arm painfully. William jumped up and pulled her away from his wife.

"Get out, get out of here now."

"This is my house. Everyone leave," Jo Anna shouted at them.

"Madam," the solicitor said, "we'll leave after the reading of the will."

Jo Anna stared hatefully at him and he realized that her character did not match her beauty. Then she stared at the others and hurried out of the room.

"Shall we continue," the lawyer said, mopping his brow. "The will reads ... I leave all that I own, the house and monetary assets to be divided equally between her and our daughter Sarah, when she comes of age. If my wife Nan is deceased, all is to go to Sarah. The

business partnership with Mr. Waters means he is now the sole owner. There's an addition. Mr. Waters is to give remuneration to the servants according to their length of time in service. He is also to provide his daughter Rose with funds to keep her until she marries."

"I shall do my best to ensure that his final wishes are carried out," Harry said as he rose to shake the lawyer's hand. "Sarah, would you sell me your old home? I've always thought of it as my home and rather than sell it to a stranger, I would like to purchase it from you."

"Where will I live?" Rose enquired.

"You can live with us, dear. It would be very lonely for you living there alone with just the servants. You can live with us until you're of age to marry. William and I have our own house and don't need the money from renting."

"You can come and visit whenever you like," Harry said to Rose. "That will be easier for you than if a stranger bought it."

"I wish I could live there with you now," Rose said, lifting her tear streaked face to him.

"That wouldn't be proper, Rose," Harry replied, as he put an arm around her shoulders. "I will be away a lot of the time so you would be alone."

"I still wish I could," Rose sighed leaning against him.

Sarah and William returned to their room and began packing for the journey home. "I'll be glad to leave this place forever," Sarah said as she folded a black dress into her traveling case.

"You were never happy here," William answered pulling her into his arms.

"Never, and neither was Father."

Harry walked down the hallway and opened the door to his room. He was surprised to see Rose sitting on his bed. He left the door open but Rose got up and closed it.

"I just came to say goodbye, Harry. Will you still write to me?"

"Of course I will, Rose. Your father would want us to keep in touch."

"Goodbye, Harry." Rose stood on her tiptoes and kissed Harry on the lips. Then she opened the door and hurried out.

Harry was astonished and he realized that Rose cared a great deal for him. Her kiss awakened in him a loneliness that she could easily satisfy, but she was not Sarah. He knew it was time for him to find a wife. Now that he was wealthy he would have his pick of women. Someone like Sarah, to replace what he could never have.

Jo Anna entered Matthew's room which she had not been in for many years. Angrily she pulled his clothes out of the closet, and threw them untidily onto the floor. She rifled through his tie tacks and cuff links, tossing aside anything that was not valuable, that she could sell. Beside the cupboard was a locked chest that drew her attention.

With the fire poker Jo Anna broke the lock and opened the lid. Inside were all the early drawings, and some from later years, that Sarah had done of her birds. Jo Anna grabbed them, pulled them out and threw into the fireplace. With shaking hands she lit a candle and threw it on top of the drawings. Hot flames burst out and began destroying the drawings. Jo Anna watched the destruction with glee wishing she could as easily destroy Sarah.

Jo Anna was now penniless. She had spent everything that her first husband had left her, on expensive dresses, and jewellery. Now she would have to sell the jewellery to keep her for the year of mourning. She wouldn't sell Ashton Hall, that was her girlhood home and she needed money to maintain it in her extravagant style. Fortunately there was already a suitor in waiting who would be glad to keep the beautiful widow in the lifestyle she was accustomed to.

The three travelers were silent on the journey home to Sarnesfield, immersed in their own thoughts. The carriage bumped over the deep ruts and shook the inhabitants who were too absorbed in sad memories to notice the discomfort. Life would never be the same without Matthew. Rose wondered if she should go back to the school. William was already deep in review of his cases. Sarah felt ill and realized she was pregnant again.

Twenty-One

Rose, age seventeen, had become a proper young lady. However, she neglected her appearance and wore ugly gray and black dresses that made her look dowdy and uninteresting. Her blonde hair hung limp around her pale face. When she smiled her eyes showed deep sadness.

"Rose," Sarah said as they strolled through the garden one afternoon, "why won't you tell me what's wrong?

"There's nothing you can do about it."

"I can try. We're sisters, and sisters listen to each other."

"Leave me alone. There's nothing you can do," Rose shouted, then turned and ran back to the house, up to her room. She threw herself on the bed and let her tears of sorrow flow. "There's nothing anyone can do," she said.

Sarah sighed hopelessly and continued her stroll through the garden which, this time, did not calm her unsettled thoughts. Even the joyful chirping of the birds did not rouse her from her worries. The time for birthing her second child was near. Her body felt uncomfortable and she would be glad when it was all over. The first eight months of her pregnancy had been easy, but lately Sarah had felt ill. Once again she feared giving birth and during the last few days, constantly thought of her mother. Her friend Elizabeth was also pregnant and due near Sarah's time. This would be the fourth child and Elizabeth fervently hoped for a son.

William worked unceasingly, studying reports from India on the Robert Hastings case. He had little time to spend with his family

and didn't notice that Sarah was lonely without him. He didn't seem to have time to share the little details of her day and the antics of their daughter, Ann.

"You never have time for us," Sarah said as she lay in bed.

William sat in a wing-back chair reading papers about the case. "I'll be there shortly, Sarah. I just need to read these last few pages."

"You're always reading the last few pages. Ann is growing up and you don't even know her. Can't you find a few hours just for us?"

"When this case is done I'll have plenty of time for the two of you."

"Then there will be three of us. It's almost time for the baby to be born."

"I know, Sarah, and I'll be glad to have another child."

"At least Rose sometimes keeps me company. There's something wrong with her. Have you even noticed?"

"Rose seems alright to me."

"But she's not and she won't tell me. I'm worried about her."

William didn't answer. "Come to bed, William. That will keep until the morning."

"Almost finished, dear."

Sarah sighed deeply and was asleep before William crawled into bed beside her. He kissed her forehead and snuggled down for a few hours of sleep.

Another week passed in routine activities for Sarah and Rose. One afternoon in their daily stroll among the budding flowers, Sarah suddenly felt a sharp pain. She knew it was time and fear filled her.

"It's time, Rose," Sarah cried as a second pain sliced through her body. She clutched her bulging stomach and gritted her teeth.

"I'll get the midwife," Rose replied. She put her arm around her sister and helped her walk unsteadily back to the house. Sarah almost crumpled as pain seared through her again. "You'll be all right, Sarah. You have to be all right!"

"Of course I'll be all right, Rose. And you'll be an aunt again."

As the midwife settled Sarah into bed, she had a feeling that this would be a difficult birth. She could see that Sarah was experiencing severe pain. A pink fluid seeped from her body. Sarah was hemorrhaging.

Seven hours later a motionless child, a boy, was pulled from Sarah's womb. She felt extremely weak and sank into a hazy emptiness. The midwife took the child and held him upside down. The baby trembled, took a shallow breath and then cried loudly. He would live and sounded like a healthy child. Sarah felt a coldness rush through her body and was too tired to fight it. She sank deeper into unconsciousness.

"She's lost a lot of blood," the midwife said to Rose, "but the bleeding's stopped now. You'd better look after the child and get some milk into him. Sarah won't be able to tend to him for awhile, if at all."

"Will Sarah die?"

"Too soon to tell, but that could happen. It was a very hard birth."

"Not Sarah, she can't die!"

"Go and feed the little one. I will stay with the mistress."

Rose held the child, who was still crying, wrapped in a soft cloth. "She won't die. Your mother has to live to see her son grow up," she said as she gently rubbed the baby dry of the birthing fluid.

William was allowed into the room. He stared at the pale, unconscious face of his beloved wife and was very worried.

"Will she be all right?"

"Of course, sir. She just needs rest."

William stood at the side of the bed and held Sarah's cold hand. Life without her would be empty, meaningless. Rose carried the baby and stood beside him. William glanced briefly at his son, then looked back at his wife.

"I should have spent more time with you. I can't lose you now. Sarah, I promise that if you get well, we'll spend more time together, all of us." The midwife quietly left the room with Rose and the baby.

Rose sat in an old rocking chair in the nursery and stared at the red-faced baby. She cuddled him as he sucked hungrily on a warm bottle of milk. Young Ann was asleep in her crib.

"Someday maybe I'll have children," Rose whispered softly. "If only it could happen."

William slept fitfully, fully clothed, on the bed beside Sarah. He held her all night in his arms, waking often to make sure she was still breathing. As the first grey light of early morning crept across the sky, Sarah awoke. She smiled weakly at her sleeping husband. William sensed she was awake and kissed her gently. Sarah would live.

"We have a son," William said. "A healthy child."

"A son! I gave you a son. Can I see him?"

"Rose is looking after him until you feel better. Rest, my love, and soon we'll bring him to you."

"Rose is a good sister."

Sarah slipped back into sleep and William continued to hold her in his arms. The long night of worry was over.

They named the baby Charles. During the months after his birth Sarah was treated like an invalid. The family physician prescribed bed rest and little excitement. He kept the bad news from her but told William. Sarah would not be able to have anymore children. When William told her, Sarah was relieved that she'd never have to go through birthing again. She had two healthy children, what more did she need.

William was disappointed that there would be no more children. He hoped that illness would not take his two children. A man needed sons and in these times if illness took one, there should be another to

be his heir. He was also relieved that Sarah would not have to worry about dying in childbirth. Life without her would be unbearable.

Warm spring weather and bright sunshine brought out the fragrant roses in Sarah's garden. As she sat blanketed in her wicker chair she listened to the song of the birds. She watched them flutter from tree to tree building nests and preparing for parenthood. A healthy glow shone from her face as she smiled at the birds. Then she remembered her sketches.

"How many years has it been since I was sketching," she muttered to herself. A familiar longing suddenly filled her, and her hands itched to hold a pencil.

"Did I pack my sketches?" she asked herself. "I don't remember bringing them with me after Father died."

Sarah pushed back the blanket and got up from her chair. She walked into the house and looked for Rose who, as usual, was up in the nursery with the children. A wet cloud blew across the sunshine. Gentle rain watered the garden and chased the birds into the protection of the trees.

"Rose," Sarah said, "do you know what I did with my sketching materials?"

"What do you want with them? You haven't done any sketches since Ann was born."

"I want to start sketching the birds again. I didn't realize how much I missed drawing them. Did I bring anything here after Father's death?"

"I don't remember you packing them. They're probably still at Ashton Hall."

"Not if Jo Anna found them."

"Speaking of Jo Anna, I heard she got married again."

"Now I know there'll be none of my drawings left. A grieving widow, indeed!"

"At least we'll never have to see her again."

"I think I'll go into town this afternoon. Do you want to come with me?"

"But you're not well enough yet."

"Of course I am. I'm tired of sitting around like an invalid. I will buy some new sketching books and start drawing again."

"What's this, my sweet?" William said as he walked into the nursery. Ann began crying and held out her arms to her father. William scooped her up and held her high in the air. She laughed and pulled at his hair.

"Enough of that, imp," William said as he put her back down where she continued playing with her toys. Charles sat in Sarah's lap enjoying a bottle of warm milk.

William put his arm his wife's shoulders, glad that she looked so well. "Did I hear you say you want to go into town? Are you feeling well enough for that?"

"Yes, darling. I've been pampered and fussed over for far too long. I'm going to start drawing birds again."

"Good. It's about time I had a lively wife again. Come to lunch then, we'll all go into town and buy whatever you need. It's also time to see the parson to arrange for Charles' christening. We can stop there as well."

"Let's make it a big event. We'll invite everyone we know."

William pulled Sarah into his arms. "Then we'll dance until dawn."

Rose took Charles from Sarah and put him into his cradle. Unnoticed, she left the nursery. Watching the happiness of Sarah and William made her feel lonely. She longed for the day when he, the only man she felt she could ever love, Harry, would hold her like that. She was almost eighteen and life was passing her by.

Several months after the birth of Sarah's son, Elizabeth had a disappointment. Her fourth child was another daughter. Both mother

and child were well, and Elizabeth could have other children. She and Jack were coming to the christening and staying for a visit. Elizabeth also had startling news that would transform her life.

"You haven't changed at all," Elizabeth said as she and Sarah hugged each other.

"Neither have you," Sarah replied, as they both laughed.

Elizabeth had a quiet, mature beauty and the beginnings of a plump matron. Her rosy, schoolgirl complexion had dimmed beneath the vogue of staying out of the sun. Her brown hair was twisted neatly at the back of her head. She wore a pale blue satin dress with a high neckline decorated with dainty lace. A frilly white shawl hung around her shoulders. Her face looked tired after the long journey but her smile was warm.

Sarah was as slim as ever, especially after her illness. Her brown hair was braided and coiled with a bow at the back of her head. She wore a bright green dress which had a low neckline that exposed the pale flesh of her neck. No lace adorned the neckline or the sleeves. The sheen of illness still clung to her face, although it was bronzed slightly by her days outside sketching in the garden, and she felt very well. Sarah did not believe that just because she was a matron, and a mother, that she had to wear a style that labelled her a boring married lady. She enjoyed bright colours and attention-getting designs.

"Old married ladies with children, and we're still acting like silly school girls." Elizabeth linked her arm with Sarah as Jack and the servants unloaded their luggage from the carriage. "Now let me see this son of yours."

"He's in the nursery with Rose. She's been looking after him and Ann while I was recovering."

"I'm glad you're better. You're my best friend and sister. It would be lonely without you."

Rose was sitting in the rocking chair, two year old Ann standing beside her, as they fed Charles. Ann, with Rose's help, was holding

the bottle of milk. She looked up when her mother and the stranger entered the room.

"Ann's beginning to look like you," Elizabeth said as she smiled at the young girl. "I hope she's quiet like Rose rather than mischievous like you were."

"Time will tell. I hope she's something like William, too."

"Would you like to hold Charles?" Rose asked as Ann let go of the bottle and ran to her mother. Sarah picked her up and cuddled her.

"I'd love to," Elizabeth answered and Charles was transferred to her waiting arms. "He's beautiful."

"You'll have a son next time," Sarah said, as she put a wiggling Ann down on the floor.

"I hope so. Jack hasn't complained. He's very fond of our four daughters."

In the parlour William, Sarah, Elizabeth, Jack, and Rose, enjoyed an early afternoon tea. Elizabeth was troubled as she looked at Rose and shared a silent question with Sarah. Sarah too looked at Rose and sighed in frustration. After the tea Elizabeth had an opportunity to speak to Rose alone. Sarah had gone to feed her children as William and Jack retired to the study.

"What's wrong, Rose?" she asked.

"Nothing's wrong, Elizabeth."

"Then where is that beautiful, always smiling Rose?"

"Grown up."

"I'm older too but not dowdy and lifeless like you. Tell me what's wrong – no, let me guess. Some man has jilted you."

"He doesn't know I even exist."

"So that's it. So you intend to pine your life away and he's probably not worth it."

"Don't say that! Harry's worth it but he can't see past someone else."

"Ah, Harry Waters, who has always loved Sarah."

"You know that!"

"Of course. I saw him many times with Sarah. I could see how he felt about her. Well, it can't be helped. He may never change and see you as the lovely young lady you are. You'll just have to find someone else."

"No, there can't be anyone else."

"Have you looked around? I'll bet you haven't, nor would anyone look at you. You look like an ancient old maid."

"I don't want to look at anyone else."

"Ah, Rose with your looks you could have young men falling all over you. Then maybe Harry will open his eyes and look at you."

"Do you think so?"

"Could be. Now let's see what we can do to make you attractive to the young men."

The christening dinner was a huge success and Rose was the belle of the ball. She wore a light pink dress that highlighted the beauty of her youth which attracted both the young men and the girls. Her hair was curled in ringlets tied with a pink bow at the back of her head. Sarah had invited the sons and daughters of the guests so Rose would feel comfortable with people of her own age. She was pleased in the change that Elizabeth had made in Rose, but Elizabeth wouldn't tell her what the problem was. Sarah was too busy to enquire further from Elizabeth and hoped that when things were quiet she would learn what it was. Elizabeth never told her.

Several days later, when all the guests had gone home, Sarah and Elizabeth relaxed in a sun-filled sitting room looking at Sarah's sketches.

"I haven't had time to paint them as yet," Sarah said.

"I'm glad that you're drawing again. You're so good at it. This blackbird looks almost real, as if he had posed for you. The feathers are so detailed. These are better than you've ever done."

"The blackbird has been visiting the feeder I set up to entice the birds. He has such a lovely early morning song. I wish I had more time for sketching."

"I'm still sketching whenever I can. It gives me a few moments away from the girls. Sometimes, if I don't feel like visiting anyone, I plead a headache and lock myself away to sketch. Jack's away quite often so I can make excuses."

"Getting ready for another war?"

Elizabeth put down the sketches on the table and looked excitedly at Sarah. "Sarah I think Jack will be part of the troop going to Canada, in the colonies."

"To the colonies! I didn't think he'd be interested in that."

"There's an appointment that he wants. Jack wants to go with John Graves Simcoe the appointed governor. If he gets the appointment, I'll go with him."

"Leave England! For how long?"

"Five years."

"What about the children?"

"They'll stay here in England with our nanny. Maybe the next one will be a boy. I expect it to be born before we go. I'll take this child with me."

"Are you expecting a child again?"

"This time it has to be a boy," Elizabeth laughed.

"Aren't you afraid of traveling to that far place?"

"No. It will be exciting to visit the colony."

"I'll miss you."

"You hardly see me now."

"But we write, and I don't have to worry about you."

"I'll be fine. I'll have a lot to write to you about."

A month later, Sarah received a letter from Elizabeth. Jack had received the appointment as an aide to Simcoe. They would be sailing to the colonies in the fall of 1791. When Elizabeth's youngest daughter was ten months old she presented Jack with another daughter. There was still no son for Jack. A few months later Elizabeth was pregnant again.

Rose was now much in demand from young gentlemen seeking a comely wife but accepted none of their proposals. When William's father, Robert, went to London for the winter, he asked Rose to go with him to be received into society. Rose was excited about the opportunity of being in London for the social season. She took her maid as a chaperone. Rose became the toast of London and discovered that she could forget Harry, until she was alone. Then no man could take Harry's place.

Sarah spent her free time sketching the birds that enjoyed her garden. During the winter she sat in the parlour and painted what she had sketched. Her daughter Ann, now three, sometimes sat with her and scribbled on paper, trying to imitate her mother. The months passed quickly and Elizabeth had another child. This time she gave birth to a desired son, to the delight of Jack and the five girls. This baby was traveling to the colonies with them.

William gained the reputation as a lawyer with a fiery tempter and sharp mind. He was no longer slender, and had become portly from the care of a good wife. Beneath his powdered barrister's wig his hair was thinning. In court spectators were drawn to watch him dazzle the other lawyers with his arguments and win cases. The case against Warren Hastings continued for five years with no end in sight. William had replaced his father as one of the major lawyers. Robert Cantwell had caught a cold one winter in London and was now living in the south of France to recuperate. Rose was still living in London with William's brother Frederick and his wife.

Sarah's life was happy with her children, and William spent more time with his family. She wrote often to Elizabeth who was preparing for her journey. Sarah traveled to London to visit before they left and stayed until they boarded the ship.

"Take care of her, Jack," Sarah said, "I expect to see you all home safe."

"Always," Jack replied, cradling their son in his arms.

"You worry too much, Sarah. Canada is a settled country with cities and roads. It's almost civilized."

"I'll miss having you near." Sarah hugged Elizabeth tightly. "Make sure you write often."

"I'll have lots to write about."

"It's time to board the ship, Elizabeth."

Elizabeth, and Jack carrying their baby son, Maxwell, walked up the entry plank into the ship. They waved to Sarah standing forlornly on the dock and disappeared from sight into the interior of the ship. Sarah wondered if she would ever see them again. Would they enjoy the colonies so much they would never return?

Twenty-Two

Sarah's sun-bronzed face stared sadly at the letter she held in her hand. It was the second letter she had received from Elizabeth in the three years she and Jack had been in Canada. Elizabeth wrote the letter during the freezing winter and had mentioned the harsh conditions they had to endure.

"All the streams are frozen ice so snow is gathered in pails and melted over the fire so we can get some water Our home has finally been finished but we can't get decent servants to cook for us. Everyone has been ill with fever, Jack and I as well as our son, Walter. The summers are so hot and we're battered by mosquitoes that leave swollen welts on our body. Walter, can you believe he's now three years old, is fascinated with the Indians who live in tents all winter. He can't understand why they don't live in houses like us."

Elizabeth's writing filled ten pages and listed many of the parties and balls she was forced to attend. She mentioned how they travelled by canoe, which was a delightful experience, and that they lived in canvas tents. At the end of the letter Elizabeth told of their loss.

"We had another daughter, Katie. One day she had red spots all over her and was very ill. The doctor couldn't do anything for her and she died when at only a few months old. She was buried here and a part of me will always remain in Canada."

Sarah sighed unhappily and folded the letter. Tears formed in her eyes as she wished she could have helped Elizabeth through her

mourning. She hoped that Elizabeth had made some close friends that had helped in their loss. In the garden, beneath a warm sun, Sarah's two children frolicked at their game of hide and seek. She smiled at them, then noticed her six year old daughter Ann who looked very pretty.

"Mamma," said Charles, five years old dressed in a jacket now covered with grass, splotches of dirt on his face. "I picked this flower for you."

"Oh how beautiful." Sarah took the flower from him. "Where did you get this?"

"Over there."

Sarah looked at the area where his chubby finger pointed and laughed. Ann was decorated with flowers in her hair, pink rhododendrons, the same as the flower Charles had handed to her. Then she hugged Charles although she knew she should discipline him.

"Well, I am pleased to see Ann looking so beautiful but the gardener won't like it. You have pulled off all the flowers from the new bush that he just planted."

"Mamma, look at me," Ann cried dancing around her mother, "I am the flower princess."

"You look very lovely, darling. We should have a maypole for you to dance around."

"Can we put one up, can we, can we?"

"We had one this year so we can't have another one until next year. Now off you go and play your game. I need to finish this painting."

Sarah put aside the letter from Elizabeth and picked up her paintbrush. She dipped it into some water and added a touch of blue to the background behind her brown thrush.

William stood in the doorway of the glassed-in winter garden. His face wore an expression of frustration, anger, weariness. He had

tried to keep his anger from erupting in court today but had not been successful. The judge had censored him and fined him for his outburst. There was eight years of work on the Hastings case with his father and still no end to the case. The prosecution lawyers had torn to shreds all of William's evidence and he had been made to look and feel useless. After a long, dark sleepless night William was finally home from London.

As he watched Sarah laughing, and playing with their children, his anger and frustration melted away. Sarah looked beautiful with a flower behind her ear, his daughter Ann with a halo of flowers on her head looked like an enchanting fairy. Charles, as usual, looked disheveled and happy. For a moment William felt left out of their charmed circle. Work took him away from home too much and he spent very little time with his family. William saw how little his family needed him to make them happy.

Fighting a court case was where William craved acceptance and success. His family would always be there, but it was court that made him feel important. However, today, after being belittled by his peers, he needed the love of his family.

"May I join this happy group?" William asked as he walked toward them.

"Papa!" Ann and Charles cried in excitement as they saw him. "You're home!"

William bent down on one knee, his arms open wide to encircle his children. As they ran to him, the flowers flew off Ann's head and swirled out behind her in a cascade of petals.

"We're so glad you're home," Ann said hugging him tightly. Charles climbed up onto his knee and almost strangled his father in a tight hug.

"I'm glad to be home."

"Come and play with us," Charles said. "We're playing hide and seek."

"Children, your father is tired," Sarah said. "Let him rest awhile."

"Of course I'll come and play with you but only if this beautiful lady with the flower in her hair will join us."

"Daddy can be the maypole." Ann laughed as she gathered up the fallen flowers and put them back in her hair. "We can dance around him."

William pulled Sarah into his arms and nuzzled her neck. "Your mother and I will be the maypole and you can dance around us," he laughed. Ann and Charles joined hands and circled their parents who were more interested in kissing than watching their children.

During the seven and a half years of marriage Sarah came to understand why William buried himself in his work. He had been neglected by his father and scorned by his brothers because his mother had made him a weakling. Now his father and brothers finally accepted him, but he felt he must keep proving himself to them. His sharp mind and concern for his clients often won his cases. When he won he was happy until his next case. When he lost a case, he became sunk in angry gloom until the next one claimed his attention. Sarah kept her distance from him when he was depressed and kept the children away from him. She knew that William needed success.

In between cases William was always restless. He roamed through the garden, rode his horse mercilessly over the meadows and spent hours reliving his successful cases with Sarah. Today was one of those rare moments when William needed his family and enjoyed being with them.

Rose often visited Sarah and William but had her own home in London where she lived with Cecila Purcell, an unmarried cousin of her father. Life for Rose was full of parties, the theatre, handsome suitors, all within a circle of suitable friends. Cecila had become like a mother to Rose, and Rose became a daughter to her. On the

same day that Sarah received a letter from Elizabeth, Rose received a letter. The letter was from Harry with upsetting news.

They had written to each other in the years since Sarah's wedding but had not visited. Rose had invited him to visit her and Cecila but Harry had not come since Oxford to see them. When she opened the letter Rose had expected the usual news of his success as an architect and his activities. She had not expected to read this. Harry was getting married.

Cecila entered the sitting room surprised to see Rose in tears. "What is the matter, my dear? I've never seen you so upset."

"Cecila, Harry's getting married."

"Who is?"

"Harry."

"Oh. Is he the one you've been writing to all these years? Well, that's good news."

"No it's not! He's not marrying me." Rose sniffed into her handkerchief then wiped away her tears.

"So that's it," Cecila sighed, "why none of those young men ever pleased you enough to marry. Did this Harry ever know that you love him?"

"No, I couldn't tell him because he is in love with Sarah."

"So you let him go. You should have told him and maybe he'd come to love you instead. Now it's too late, he's marrying someone else. It's time to find a new love or you'll end up an old lady alone like me."

"Did you ever love anyone so much that no one else could take his place?"

"Yes," Cecila said. She thought back to the young man who loved her. "I have and still do. He was killed in a war long before you were born."

"Then I too will never marry and we'll always live together."

"You are still young and lovely. You'll live many years longer than me and will be alone. Don't let that happen to you. Marry that nice young man that's always asking."

"Frederick would make a nice husband, but Harry will always be my love."

The summer months passed quickly and dreary winter months kept Sarah and her children inside the house. William was still busy in London working on the Hastings case. Rose came to visit. She seemed unhappy but once again did not tell Sarah the reason. William had heard of Harry's marriage and told Sarah, who couldn't understand why Rose was so sad. The sisters did not discuss his marriage. Rose no longer wrote to Harry except for a final letter to congratulate him on his wedding. She returned to London and life settled into a dull pattern, a round of parties and more suitors. Frederick got tired of waiting for her answer and married someone else.

Cecila and Rose traveled to France for the winter months, Switzerland for the summer and sometimes visited friends in Yorkshire, England. Rose was becoming the old maid that Cecila had feared she would. Rose rejected suitor after suitor. Then Cecila died and Elizabeth, after five years, returned from Canada.

Elizabeth, Jack and their two children had stopped in London with Sarah and William. Ann and Charles were there as well to meet Elizabeth's son Walter. After greeting each other, the three children disappeared upstairs to the nursery to occupy themselves with their playthings and have afternoon tea. The adults had their own tea in the parlour.

"Elizabeth, you look so ill," Sarah cried as she hugged her.

"I feel well," Elizabeth replied, but I am glad to get away from that climate. It was either extremely hot or freezing. It's only from the long journey home. Ocean travel doesn't agree with me. You look like a contented matron."

Elizabeth's dress hung loosely on her thin body. Her face was pale and dark shadows hung beneath her weary eyes. When she

removed her bonnet Sarah could see her hair had strands of gray woven through the brown. Sarah filled out her dress with the added pounds she had gained. Her glossy brown hair was twisted into an attractive bun at the back of her head and there was no sign of any gray strands. A few small wrinkles creased the skin near her eyes which shone with health.

"You and Jack must stay with us for awhile until you feel better. The children will enjoy time with Walter."

"I think that would be lovely. I am so weary after all that travelling. Jack has to meet with Lord Simcoe who has also returned so he won't be around much. Our daughters are all in school so it will be a few months before we all go home."

"Come, sit here and I will be your nursemaid," Sarah laughed as Elizabeth sat down on the settee with a pillow behind her back. "We'll have some hot tea. Did you get much tea in Canada?"

"Oh yes, but it was never as fresh as English tea."

"Well, then I'll have to fill you with real English tea and sweet jam scones. That will bring you back to health."

Sarah took Elizabeth and the children with her back to Sarnesfield. They spent several happy months catching up with the past. Elizabeth soon regained her health and together she and Sarah spent hours sketching and comparing their drawings. After Cecila's death Rose joined them. Once again Elizabeth was concerned that Rose looked so unattractive and unhappy.

"Sarah told me about Harry's marriage," Elizabeth said to Rose as they strolled through the garden.

"No one else can take his place. I've tried, Elizabeth, I've tried."

"You're still young, Rose. There may come a time when the right one will step into your life and you'll forget Harry."

"Perhaps. Until then I will live here with Sarah and William. Cecila's house was sold. I could have purchased it but it wouldn't have been the same without her."

"Well, if you need a change, you can always come and visit me. The children will be away at school and Walter doesn't need me as much now that he's almost six."

"I would like that, Elizabeth."

"Jack will be in London quite often and when I am there you can join us."

"I will come then."

The years passed and Sarah's routine was busy with her paintings. Ann and Charles were now at boarding school so she had more time to paint. Rose was often in London with Elizabeth and William was still immersed in the Hastings case. Sarah and William had been married for fourteen years and were comfortable with each other but didn't spend much time together. Finally, after thirteen years the Hastings case was settled. Warren Hastings was exonerated due to his brilliant barristers, one who was William Cantwell. William was celebrated as the lawyer whose arguments had won the case and the only barrister on the case since the beginning. His father, Robert Cantwell, had retired after only a few years working on this case. New cases were lined up for William to deal with, some from well-known political people. In spite of waiting cases, he felt restless.

"I'm tired, Sarah. Tired of being in the court day after day, dealing with facts that have to be explained over and over again in different ways."

"Then stay home for awhile, William. Ann and Charles will be home on holidays soon and will enjoy your presence."

"I will do that. It will be nice not to have to travel so much."

"It will be nice having you around. We spend so little time together these days. Shall we give a party to welcome the children home?"

"Just a few, Elizabeth and Jack if he is available. I don't feel like seeing too many people right now."

"I'll start planning it and write to Elizabeth and Rose."

William slept very little and spent his time walking or riding. These activities did not calm his restlessness. He couldn't sit still and quickly became bored with whatever he was doing. Ann and Charles were pleased to see their father but had their own activities that kept them busy. Sarah spent less time painting and sketching but with William away from the house found empty time on her hands.

"Would you like me to ride with you sometimes?" Sarah enquired one morning while they had breakfast.

"Perhaps sometime. Not today though," William replied. "I want to go into town and meet with some people about a case I might take on."

Sarah and William finished their breakfast in silence. Then William kissed her briefly on the top of her head and missed the unhappy tears in Sarah's eyes as he left the room.

Sarah stared at the closed door and felt intensely lonely. He didn't want her company. They barely talked together except when Ann and Charles were around. Was it the many years of marriage that had left them nothing to say to each other?

Sarah arranged the small party of friends and a few neighbours, whom William seemed to enjoy, but he drank more than usual. Elizabeth and Jack were unable to attend. Other times, William spent long hours alone reading about his boyhood idol Robert Clive of India. Nothing seemed to interest him, not even new cases. Until he received word about an appointment he had requested that significantly changed life for him and Sarah.

Twenty-Three

William felt ill as he churned with apprehension, at what he had done! Alone in his study he paced the floor, his fingers brushed through his already disordered hair. This was something he had to do, had already done, but how would he tell Sarah. He had signed his name to an agreement that had been his dream, an opportunity he couldn't turn down. It was almost two weeks of agony then he discovered an easy way to tell Sarah. Warren Hastings had become a friend and was often invited to dinner.

"Warren. How nice to see you again," Sarah said to Warren as he entered the drawing room.

"Thank you for your kind invitation to dine with you," Warren answered. "If it wasn't for the enormous amount of work by your excellent husband, William, I wouldn't have the privilege of being here. After thirteen years I thought he'd be tired of seeing me anywhere."

"Come now, Warren," William laughed. "You're too kind. After all this time I would miss being in your company. Now we can enjoy friendship instead of just client and lawyer."

"And this is your sister, Rose, whom I've heard so much about." Warren smiled at her, lifted her hand and kissed it. Rose blushed and tried to pull her hand away. "And no man has as yet claimed her bountiful charms."

"Ah, Warren. You are still a rogue with the ladies." William laughed. "Shall we have a glass of wine before dinner?"

Rose escaped and sat beside Sarah. She stared at the flowered carpet on the floor and tried to hide her embarrassment. Sarah sighed and put her arm around Rose's shoulders.

"He is just teasing, Rose, and he's too old to be considered as a husband."

"I don't want a husband. I'm happy as I am," Rose whispered. "I don't need a husband. Papa left me enough to live quietly without a husband."

"Husbands can be difficult but I'm glad I have William." She smiled at William across the room who was speaking quietly with Warren.

"Have you told her yet?" Warren asked.

"No," William replied feeling guilty. He sipped at his wine and refused to look at Sarah. "Perhaps you can help."

"Ah, I see. That's why I've been invited to dinner. I'll do what I can."

"Thanks, Warren."

The dining table sparkled with crystal goblets and glowing candles. The best china had been set out with gleaming silverware. The servants carried in steaming bowls of onion and cheese soup, followed by sole fish, tender roast beef, and Yorkshire pudding. Glasses of wine were consumed and everyone, including Rose, enjoyed stimulating conversation.

"Your husband tells me you love to draw and paint birds," Warren said, smiling warmly at Sarah.

"I would be pleased to show some of them to you," Sarah said, as she nodded to the servant holding a carafe of wine to refill their glasses.

"The birds of India are exotic creations. Such beautiful colours. They would make wonderful subjects for you to paint. I loved to wander in the early mornings to watch them."

"So I've heard." Sarah laughed. "I prefer a quiet beauty, like our own English birds."

"Then it's time your sense of enchantment was awakened. There's a whole world of new birds in India for you to capture in your paintings."

"When will I ever get a chance to venture off to India to paint them? I'm an old matron of 35," Sarah said wondering at Warren's sudden interest in birds.

"In a year and a half," William said guiltily.

"What!"

"In a year and a half, my dear. I've accepted a position in the courts of India." Sarah stared in angry amazement as William gripped his glass, gulped down his wine and emptied the glass. Her hand quivered, and her glass of wine splattered several drops onto the white cloth.

Warren gazed away from her and looked with sympathy at William. Rose choked on a sip of wine as she stared at Sarah.

"India! You agreed to go to India? Without discussing this with me first? How could you? You want to drag me off to that barbaric place, and our children! What about our children? Warren, did you assist him with this decision?"

"Warren is not responsible for my decision," William stated firmly. ""Long before Warren's case, India has been a place I longed to go. It's because of Robert Clive. I want to see the country where he fought and lived. As a child I read and studied everything I could on Robert Clive and his life in India. When the opportunity arose I immediately accepted. I intend to go to India." He motioned to a servant who refilled William's glass. He emptied the glass of wine in one gulp.

"Then you will go alone. I have our children to think of."

"They are in school and you hardly see them now. I can't go alone, Sarah. I want to share India with you, show you all the things that Robert Clive achieved. Frederick and his wife will look after the house. They're tired of living in London."

"So it's already been planned out without consulting me."

"India is quite civilized, my dear," Warren commented. "Except for the heat, we British carry on exactly as we do at home."

"It's a barbarous country. There's always fighting," Sarah said, as she stared angrily at William as his glass was refilled with wine.

"Small squabbles, my dear. Nothing serious."

"Sarah, it's my chance to fulfill a dream. A chance to be part of a great new world. You'll love India when you see it. Come with me."

"William, why must you have this dream fulfilled?"

"I'm restless here in England. I need a new challenge and India has always been a place I want to go. I have to take this opportunity or it may never arise again."

"I wish I'd known that before I married you."

"I never thought I'd have this opportunity."

"Sarah," Warren said, as he placed his hand over her shaking one, "think about it. It would be a great adventure, exciting and different. There's so much sunshine. I miss the sunshine. Perhaps Rose can go with you. There are many lonely men out there just waiting for a pretty face to marry."

Rose gripped her hands together. She glanced between the angry face of her sister and the guilty face of her brother-in-law. India! So far away from all she knew.

"Yes, Rose. Why don't you come with us?" William said.

"Us? I haven't said I'd go with you."

"Please, darling, please come with me!"

Sarah rose from the table, her meal unfinished and stared at the two men. Tears of anger sparkled in her eyes. Then she sat down again.

"How could you do this, William?"

Rose looked down at her almost empty plate. Her thoughts were chaotic as she considered her monotonous life living with Sarah and

William. Empty days loomed ahead of her if they went without her. She knew that once Sarah's anger passed she would not let William go alone. She had to go with them. Living with William's brother and his family would not be enjoyable. Frederick's wife wouldn't want her there. She looked up at Warren Hastings and he smiled warmly at her. Perhaps she could find someone to marry just to have someone. No, she could never allow another man to be her husband. As she stared at Sarah and William, Rose felt a dread of the future which filled her with panic. She would be so far away from England and from Harry.

After Warren and Rose retired to their rooms, William and Sarah continued their argument. It evolved into fierce love-making which always ended their disagreements. Cuddled into one another their thoughts of separation reminded them of the past. Sarah thought of the years without William, the emptiness she had experienced when they had been apart before their marriage. William cursed his too quick acceptance and how he couldn't leave without his wife.

"How can you be so thoughtless and agree to go without asking me first?" Sarah said as she briskly brushed her long hair.

"I was afraid to ask you before I signed the agreement. I knew you wouldn't agree."

"Of course I wouldn't agree. India is so far away and even though Warren said it's civilized, there is always fighting against the British rule."

"That's one of the reasons I'm going, to help settle these disputes."

"Can't someone else do that?" Sarah said slamming her brush down on her dressing table.

"I'm very qualified," William answered, putting his arms around her. "I've studied India for a long time."

"You should have discussed this with me first."

"It's a great opportunity for me," William said. "I couldn't turn it down."

"Elizabeth wouldn't let Jack go without her," Sarah said softly, as William pulled her face up to his for a lingering kiss. "How can I let you go alone?"

"Does that mean you'll come with me?" William asked hopefully.

"I don't know. How can I leave our children?"

"They're almost grown up now. Soon they'll be leaving us."

"Not for many years. They'll miss us."

"Elizabeth left her children."

"I don't know how she could do that. She took their son with them.

"It's a difficult life for children leaving home."

"Not much easier for me to leave all I know and go to that strange country."

"You'd soon get used to it. You've always been a determined lady. You can do anything you set your mind to."

"But India – so far away." Sarah pulled herself out of William's arms and sat on the edge of the bed.

"It's a British colony so only the country would be different. Not the people."

"I can't let you go alone. I would miss you so much."

"Then you'll come with me!"

"Yes, I'll come."

"Darling, you've made me so happy."

William's dreams were sweet as he dreamed of finally stepping onto the soil of his hero Robert Clive. Sarah' dreams were tortured with images of their children. She tried to reach them but Ann and Charles were always beyond her grasp. Ann and Charles stretched out their arms and cried for her, but she couldn't get near them. A dark cloud floated before their image, and they faded as Sarah searched and searched for them.

In her lonely bed Rose cried tears of pain for Harry. Why was her life so unfilled? A nameless fear invaded her dreams, an unformed darkness that held images of the future. In the morning Rose remembered nothing of her dreams, just the memory of a deep fear.

"You're going where?" Elizabeth cried when she heard the news from Sarah several weeks later. Sarah had travelled to visit Elizabeth at her home in Wolford Lodge and tell her in person.

"Madras, India."

"So far away! At least you will be warm, not like the colony in Canada."

"I hate to leave Ann and Charles, but they're at school most of the time."

"They can come and visit with us during the holidays. How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know, at least six years."

"You'll have amazing new birds to paint."

"So Warren Hastings tells me."

"Our husbands are very unique men. They have to have challenges. I'm glad I went with Jack. It was difficult, but at least I was with him. We shared the journey together. You will be glad you decided to go. Both of us are lucky to have husbands we love and who love us in return."

"That's the problem. If I didn't love William so much, I would be glad to see him go alone."

Elizabeth and Jack had been back in England for seven years and were stationed there permanently. Jack's health had declined during the years and he spent more time at home than as an aide. During these years, Elizabeth had two more children, one a daughter and another son. A few months after his birth, her second son died.

The year 1799 was a busy year for Sarah. There were so many things to arrange before they left England. Ann and Charles were unhappy, but excited that their parents were traveling to the colonies. At 13, Ann was a beautiful young lady involved with school and friends. She had suddenly discovered that young men were delighted to be in her company. In a few years she would marry and start her own family. She saw her parents during holidays and would not miss them as much as her mother feared. Charles was 12 and already a handsome lad who was on a winning school team playing cricket. He felt too old to show how he would miss his parents. Alone he worried about the climate and warring factions in India. He and his father were not as close as some fathers and sons due to William's absence working on the Hastings case. Charles was closer to his mother. He would miss her being there for him when he needed her, which wasn't as much now that he was 12. It was just the thought of her being so far away.

"Elizabeth and Jack are giving a dinner gala for us," Sarah said to William. She held the invitation in her hand and showed it to him.

"When?"

"Next month in London. She's invited Warren Hastings and many of your clients and friends, and of course, your brothers and their families."

"Is Jack well enough for this?"

"She says he is. He's looking forward to the gathering."

"Rose is invited, too?"

"Of course. She's sent Rose her own invitation."

Music wafted through the large hall as people gathered to attend the farewell gala. The hall was brightly lit with tall, elegant candelabra filled with flickering candles. A fire blazed in the ornate fireplace. In another room, a long table held delicious dishes of cold

roast beef, sweet desserts and other delicacies for the guests to partake of. Chairs, set against the walls, were filled with elderly ladies cooling themselves with fluttering fans. Long dresses rustled in time with the music as couples danced, flirted, laughed and enjoyed themselves. Sarah and William swirled among the dancers and chatted to everyone they knew. Rose, at twenty-five, was still a sought after partner. She laughed and teased the young men who claimed her as a partner but she didn't dance more than once with the same gentleman. In the early hours of the morning the weary went home and an exhausted Rose went to her room. Sarah and William stayed until the last guest left.

Rose sighed and wished Harry had been there tonight. He had been invited but had been away at a building site in north England. She yawned and drifted into a troubled sleep. A dream led Rose to a dazzling, hot country where she stood outside a low white building. She could hear the raucous sound of birds but could not see them. The dream led her to a cemetery, and she stood beside a deep grave dug into the earth. At the head of this hole was a gravestone. Mist suddenly swept across the grave obscuring the name on the stone. A boney hand reached out of the hole, stretched toward her and grabbed onto her skirt. The hand pulled her toward the grave. Rose screamed as she pulled away from the grave. She awoke screaming, safe in bed in Elizabeth's home.

No one heard Rose's screams. She lay quiet, trying to calm herself. The fear that had begun many months before now filled her. Rose knew why. This was an omen of the future – her death. She got out of bed, pulled on her warm slippers and a thick robe. Rose huddled in a chair near the smoldering fireplace. She reached out and stirred the ashes with the poker, then added some logs. The fire blazed warmly but did not end the chill of fear that Rose felt. Harry filled her thoughts, Harry, who if she died would never know how much she loved him. Rose moved to the writing desk and pulled out

a blank sheet of paper, opened the inkwell and dipped in the pen nib.

"Dear Harry," she began writing, "I wish I had told you, that night of Sarah's wedding, how much I loved you but I was afraid. I didn't want you to turn to me because you lost her. I wanted you to love me for myself. I should have told you in our letters to each other and maybe you would have married me instead of someone else. Now that we are going to India, I fear I will not return. Goodbye Harry. I will always love you, even in death. Yours forever, Rose."

Rose blotted the page, folded it, and sealed it with wax. She held the letter against her bosom, and put it in her travel case. The letter would be sent just before they sailed, six months from now.

Sarah ordered supplies for her painting needs including a special carrying case constructed for her paper and paints. The case was metal and wood, measuring four feet wide and five feet long. It was bound in brass with a safety lock to keep it from opening if the ocean was rough. It was also waterproof for the paper which measured three feet by two feet. There were two hundred sheets already packed inside the carrying case. She had ordered brushes and water colour paints that she hoped would last a long time. Supplies from England would take many months to reach India so Sarah wanted to take as much as she could before they left.

The time had come to leave for India. The ship sat in the dock ready for Sarah, William and Rose to board. Elizabeth had said her goodbyes. All their luggage and supplies had already been loaded and the ship would leave tomorrow with the morning tide. Now a carriage waited outside the house for them. Rose gave one of the servants the letter to Harry with instructions to send it once they were gone. She climbed into the carriage after Sarah and William, and went to meet the fate that awaited her in India. She was terrified of the future but kept her fears to herself.

Twenty-Four

Harry sat at the desk in his library and stared at the unopened letter in his hand. His hair was almost grey and his forehead was creased with lines from sadness and disappointment at where life had led him. A successful man in the field of architecture and building his designs, he was now wealthy but alone. His wife had died in childbirth a year after their marriage, and the son she bore had died a few weeks later.

Marriage to Bella, was a brief, happy period of his life. They met when he renovated her father's home in Shropshire and were married a year later. She was a gentle, fragile woman unlike Sarah. He loved Bella but she couldn't replace his intense love for Sarah. Pregnancy was difficult for Bella and she was confined to bed until the birth of the child.

Harry was still a young man in his late thirties but looked much older. Work consumed his time but often he wondered what he was doing it for. He had no family and was not interested in a second wife. Until this letter arrived.

He held on to the letter as memories carried him back to a happier time. Harry thought of Rose, beautiful Rose who could not compete with her sister Sarah. The last time he saw Rose she had kissed him and he had held her in his arms. The memory re-awakened in his thoughts and he was astonished at its clarity. Her face had been unhappy and tears had glittered at the edge of her eyes. This memory of Rose was so vivid that it could have happened yesterday. Memories of Sarah were faded and he could hardly

remember her face. Harry was surprised as he felt he would always love Sarah. Rose was the one he remembered more than her sister. Harry sliced open the letter.

Rose had not written to him in many years. Why had she suddenly decided to write to him now? He unfolded the letter and began reading. *"Dear Harry," he read, "I wish I had told you that night at Sarah's wedding, how much I loved you...."* Harry laid the letter back on the desk and stared out the window into his garden. His thoughts were in a turmoil. She loved him...how long had that been? Had he been too blind to see the love he'd been searching for, not in Sarah but in Rose? His despair at Sarah's marriage to another man had sent him into the arms of the first girl who showed interest in him. He had liked her but not loved her. Perhaps that was why she had not satisfied him. Rose loved him. Harry picked up the letter and continued reading. He was shocked to learn that she was leaving for India in a week's time. What did he feel about her? Could he find happiness with her? She loved him, could he ever learn to love her? Not if she was far away in India. What did she mean "even in death?" Was Rose ill and was that why she had to tell him now of her love for him? He tossed aside the letter, then picked it up, folded it and put it in his pocket. Jumping up from his chair, he pulled the satin cord and summoned his housekeeper.

"I must leave in an hour," he said to the astonished woman. "Tell my groom to get my horse ready. I'll need to take some food to last a few days, so prepare it for me. I must be in London in three days."

"Three days!" Mrs. Blackmeyer gasped. "It's a week's journey, sir. You can't reach London in that time."

"I must get there as quick as I can. I'll pack my own bag."

It was a wild ride to London through mud and bad roads. The groom, Tom, went with Harry. They slept for a few hours in country hostels but travelled night and day. The horses were changed at way stations but not fast enough for Harry. He pushed them, Tom and

himself almost beyond endurance. The journey took six days and Harry arrived too late. The ship carrying Sarah, William and Rose had left several days early. Six years would pass before Harry received news of Rose.

Sarah leaned on the railing of the ship and viewed her last sight of England, Land's End. The weather had been rough during their two days of sailing and her queasy stomach was finally getting used to the pitch and roll of the ship. Rose was still ill, lying in her cabin, unable to eat. William spent a lot of time with the Captain, learning their route to India. The Captain was pleased to show him the instruments used for navigation. Huge canvas sails flapped and billowed above Sarah as the wind pushed the ship farther and farther from land. Gray clouds scudded across the vast sky almost touching the heaving sea. Crewmen hurried past Sarah, as they adjusted sail and climbed ropes.

Sarah began to enjoy sea travel. The air was fresh and she felt free as the wind whipped her hair around her face. She had tried to keep it tied, but as long as she was outside the cabin the wind blew her hair in disarray. She had never before been on a ship and everything was new and exciting. The sea had a powerful magnetism that drew her outside to watch the seagulls soar around waiting for scraps and garbage thrown to them. The deep blue water churned around the ship in foamy swirls as it cut through the waves. Sarah realized that she loved this form of travel. However, she missed her children and the life she knew. How many years would it be before she saw them again? She was afraid of the unknown new life in India but also eager to see the wonderful birds that Warren Hastings had talked about.

William strolled out of the cabin and stood beside Sarah at the railing. He put his arms around her and smiled at her happy face. He too missed his children but finally his dream of India was becoming reality.

"You look like you're enjoying yourself."

"Oh William, I love the sea. It's powerful and beautiful. I feel like I am flying with the birds."

"It's better than bumping over bad roads and sloughing through mud."

"I hope I still like it after we've been on it for a long time."

"Are you sorry you decided to come with me?"

"A little. I miss our children. They will be grown up when we return."

"They are already grown and don't need us as much as they used to."

"I guess you're right."

"I'm always right." William laughed as Sarah tried to hit him. He grabbed her hand and kissed it passionately, then pulled her tight against him and kissed her cold lips. They were acting like the young lovers they had once been, finding again that magic of new love. In their cabin that night, they made love with renewed passion that work and responsibility had dimmed into routine. It was as if they had just discovered each other and were beginning life together.

Days passed in pleasant laziness as the sturdy vessel sailed toward its destination. For safety reasons the ship sailed miles away from Spain where marauding Spanish pirates searched for English ships to destroy and take valuable cargo. Rose finally adjusted to the rolling motion of the ship and was able to enjoy the voyage. As an unmarried, attractive woman the sailors treated her well, especially one officer who was very attentive to her.

Rose sat in a chair on the deck of the ship. She held a book on her lap but wasn't reading. Thoughts of the future swirled around in her head. A strong breeze blew tendrils of brown hair around her attractive face as the sun sparkled on the limitless sea.

"Good morning, Miss Purcell," Henry Barston said as he stopped beside her. He was one of the ship's officers. "I'm glad to see that you're feeling better today."

"Thank you," Rose replied. "I am too. I'm beginning to enjoy sailing." She smiled up at the bronzed young man who didn't seem in a hurry to leave for his duties.

"We are sailing in African waters today. It should be a smooth passage."

"It seems to be."

"You'll feel the heat soon. I hope you have something cooler to wear."

"Most of the lighter dresses are packed away to wear in India. We didn't think of the heat in traveling."

"If you need anything from your trunks, I'm sure one of the officers would be pleased to escort you to where they are stowed."

"Perhaps we might need something. Thank you."

"Good day to you, miss," Henry Barston said as he reluctantly left to continue his duties.

Rose smiled warmly at Henry. She enjoyed his company and had purposely sat on deck to wait for him to pass. She pushed aside the fears about her dream that still haunted her. Once more they had frightened her in the night. Harry was far away and she would never see him again. Why not pursue some happiness with someone else while there was still some time left? Henry Barston was an acceptable young man who seemed very interested in her. Yet, was it fair to him if she had so little time? Sighing deeply, Rose closed her book and went inside the salon. No, it was not fair and as much as she wanted, she had to avoid him so he wouldn't become too fond of her.

Two weeks passed and the air became warmer as they sailed around Africa. There had been several stops to purchase supplies, refresh the water supply and deliver trade goods. Sarah and Rose

had removed the numerous petticoats beneath their dresses which was cooler, but they did not wish to search the trunks for lighter fabrics. The nights were uncomfortably warm and Rose found it difficult to sleep. She was outside on the deck trying to find a cool breeze when Henry Barston approached her.

"You've been avoiding me," he said, sadly.

"There can never be a life with me," Rose replied, looking away from him.

"Why not, Rose? I know you are beginning to care for me. Is it because I'm just a poor sailor?" He moved closer and held Rose's hand. She leaned against him and he put his arms around her.

"It's not your being a poor sailor. I do like you very much."

"Then why is it? Why can't you take the love I offer? Are you going to India because of an illness?"

"No, I am quite well. I can't tell you why, Henry."

"I'm sorry, Rose. Can we at least share these days on board before I lose you forever?"

"I'm sorry Henry. Yes, we can spend the time together. I wish things could be different, but it's not fair to you." Rose lifted her face to him and he kissed her gently.

"I will at least have these few days to think on when we're apart."

A few days later the breeze died and the ship was becalmed on a vast ocean of stifling heat. William, Sarah and Rose were extremely uncomfortable. The crewmen were shirtless as they moved about their tasks with sweat dripping off their bodies. Water was rationed and without routine duties the crewmen were idled. They began quarreling amongst themselves, which often erupted into physical clashes. Sarah and Rose were told to keep to their cabins to avoid causing more friction between the inactive crew members. William was restless, pacing his cabin or the deck, trying to feel cooler.

Idleness and the heat were new to William and he did not like either of them. Was this what it would be like in India? As he leaned over the deck's railing, Henry Barston joined him. They acknowledged each other but did not exchange a greeting. William did not like Henry paying attention to Rose and had told him. Two of the muscular crewmen sat nearby throwing dice. One of the sailors disagreed with the way the die had been thrown and stood up ready to attack the other. Henry moved to separate them but William moved quicker.

"That's enough," William cried. He lashed out with his fists and punched one of the crewmen in the stomach. "I can't take anymore of this petty quarrelling or your malicious voices."

The other crewman jumped at William and the three men fell down on the hard deck. Henry tried to pull them apart but was punched for his efforts. William kept pounding at the man below him while the one on top of him kept pummeling with his fists. William hadn't fought this hard since the incident with his brothers. He was out of shape but kept swinging his fists, connecting with both men and sometimes hitting Henry. Blood flowed from a cut over William's eye and the man below him had blood streaming from a broken nose. Other crew members stood around the fighters egging on their mates to smash the perpetrator and strike a blow for the common man.

The noise brought the Captain on deck followed by Sarah and Rose. They were shocked at the melee of men pounding at each other. Several other crewmen began fighting until there were three separate skirmishes on the deck. When one of the crewman picked up a wooden club the Captain knew it was time to stop the struggles.

"Bucket brigade," the Captain shouted to the onlookers. Immediately buckets were lowered by rope into the ocean, and when pulled up, water exploded over the combatants. The deck became slippery and the fighters slithered out of reach of each other. More

buckets of water tossed over the men ended the struggles. William slipped on the waterlogged deck and continued smashing at the crewmen. A fist crashed into his jaw and he was knocked out. The hot air was filled with curses and groans as the crewmen slumped against the cabin walls and wiped blood and sea water from their faces. Henry and another crewman, who had not been fighting, carried William to a dry section of the deck where Sarah and Rose knelt beside him. His face was covered with blood and the crewman pressed a cloth against the cut on his forehead, which would later require several stitches. A ration of beer was doled out to the crew and this calmed them down.

The following morning there were many bruised faces, sore muscles and one very sore jaw. William sat on a chair on the deck. He couldn't remember fighting or why it had happened. Sarah sat next to him, anxious about the cut. She smiled mischievously at him and laughed as she explained why he had a sore jaw.

"You gave those crewman some good bruises. It was Henry Barston who punched you in the jaw when you wouldn't stop fighting."

"I don't remember fighting them. I just couldn't stand their quarrelling anymore. I'll get even with that Henry."

"He was only doing his duty. He had to stop you somehow."

"Well, he had no right to hit me."

"You had no right getting involved in that brawl."

"I'll be glad when this journey is over. I prefer solid land beneath my feet."

The captain ordered his officers to patrol the deck and keep the crewmen under control. There had been too much fighting and the men had to be in condition to resume their duties when the wind returned. There were two more sizzling days when tempers were harder to control before a gentle breeze announced the end of waiting. Sails filled and fluttered as the ship once more moved across the ocean waves. A squall forced the ship off course and it

was two days before they returned to their original route. It took the ship two more weeks to sail into the Indian Ocean. One week later they arrived in Madras, India, in the year1801. William was pleased to finally be on dry land. A smiling government official waited at the port with some surprising news for William.

Mail had arrived by the fast ships of the East India Company. The company owned sleek, fighting ships that made the journey from England in half the time of a trader ship. William had chosen the slower ship because it was more comfortable than the smaller ships.

William, Sarah and Rose were housed in a two storey white house in the centre of the city of Madras. The bedrooms were at the back of the house near an open courtyard where trees shaded a garden. The rooms at the front of the house faced the street where a smaller garden was set inside a brick wall. The staff bowed as William, Sarah and Rose walked in behind the porter carrying their luggage. They all spoke English, so there was no language problem which Sarah had been afraid would happen. As they sat in the back garden, William opened the mail that had been waiting for him.

"Is it what you'd hoped for?" Sarah asked.

"Let me read it and find out," William laughed as Rose sipped at a cooling glass of lemonade.

William slowly read the letter in his hand while Sarah fumed at his reticence. Once more he read the words in the letter just to keep Sarah waiting. Then he smiled and handed the letter to her. Rose looked at William and Sarah puzzled at what this was all about. Sarah jumped up and threw her arms around William.

"You deserve it, you know. After all those years of defending Warren Hastings, you should have received this earlier on."

"Yes, my dear, I agree. Warren said it would take time to come."

"What are you two talking about?" Rose asked.

"William has just received a knighthood, Rose. He is now Sir William Cantwell. And I am Lady Cantwell."

"You are a lady now?" Rose stood up and curtseyed before her sister and brother-in-law. "My lady." Then she laughed as Sarah stood beside her.

"Rise, dear sister. In private you may call me Sarah."

"Thank you, your ladyship."

The three of them laughed together as they shared the contents of the letter with Rose.

"This calls for a celebration," William announced. "Let's arrange a dinner. It will be a good way to meet everyone that we will be associating with for the next ten years. Lord Wellsley will be returning soon, so we'll wait until the governor returns next week."

"Lady Cantwell," Sarah said, just to hear her new title, "and Lord William Cantwell."

"Well, my Lady, shall we dine?" He held out his hand to Sarah and they proceeded into the house in regal style. Once more Rose felt alone as William and Sarah were enveloped in their own world. Henry Barston and the captain were to dine with them tomorrow and Rose would have him to ease her loneliness. The ship was to remain in Madras for a month then would journey back to London. At this moment Rose wondered if she should forget the bleak future and become Henry's wife. Then she followed William and Sarah, still undecided what to do.

Fate stepped in and Rose never saw Henry again. She was told by the captain the next evening, that while supervising the unloading and loading of the ship, Henry was assaulted by a thug who tried to steal some of the cargo. Henry cracked his head against the stone pavement and died instantly. Rose was in India to stay under the control of her destiny.

Twenty-Five

Rose lay still in the canopied bed with the covers thrown back. Sticky heat penetrated the house and perspiration glistened on her pale face. It was quiet in her room. Even the birds and animals slept in the afternoon heat. She had been ill for the past month after the shock of Henry's death. Loneliness and thoughts of always being on her own, or dependant on living with Sarah and William, severely depressed her. Henry had been an opportunity to have someone who cared for her, with the prospect of her own family. She ate very little and this left her feeling lethargic and weary.

For a moment, as she opened her eyes, she felt frightened. Where was she? Then memory returned as she recalled that this was India and not England. Tears filled the corners of her eyes as she craved the coolness and familiarity of home and Harry. Would she ever see either again?

Dark dreams had haunted Rose during her illness. They were dreams of death and a gaping coffin hole. She sat up and dried her tears on a corner of the cotton sheet. Her nightdress was for an English climate, not a sweltering Indian one. The nightdress was wet and clung to her thin frame. Limp brown hair hung down her back in a mess of tangles from her agitated sleep. Sighing deeply, Rose got up from the bed and walked to the stand where a pitcher of water sat beside a large washing bowl. She poured water into the bowl and splashed it across her face. Above the stand was a mirror. Rose was shocked at her reflection.

"Enough! I am not going to spend the rest of whatever life I have, sulking and ill in bed," Rose said to her mirror reflection. "There must be some happiness somewhere for me before I'm gone."

Rose pulled off her damp nightdress and dumped it on the floor. She splashed water over as much of her naked body as she could reach. She felt a bit cooler and pulled on cotton undergarments. Over this she put on a thin woolen dress too hot for the climate, but it was all she had.

"I must ask Sarah to have some lighter dresses made for me," she said out loud to the empty room.

Rose brushed the tangles out of her damp hair and tied it in a loose knot behind her head. The heat surrounded her and she felt faint. Then pushing the feeling away Rose left her bedroom. Sarah was resting in her room and the servants were not around either.

"I've had enough resting," Rose muttered to herself. She walked slowly down the short hallway to the door that led into the garden. As she opened the door the heat engulfed her with a scorching blast. She felt faint again and hesitated, then stepped out into the garden.

The gardener had tried to maintain an English style garden but the heat was too much for rose bushes and the flowers always wilted. A table and chairs were set beneath a broad, ancient banyan tree. It was cooler here, shaded, and Rose sat down on one of the white, ironwork chairs. Around her the garden was filled with unfamiliar trees. One was a large tree with heart shaped leaves and cup-shaped flowers. It was very pretty and Rose lifted her hand and touched one of the flowers that was cool to touch despite the afternoon heat. As Rose held the flower in her hand she heard a rustling sound in the short grass at her feet. She froze as she knew it was some kind of snake. The long light brown snake, with black splotches on its body, slowly slithered through the grass just missing Rose's foot, then was gone. Rose took a deep breath and shivered at her escape from

instant death. She was used to England's snakes, mainly the common green garter snake. India's snakes were too frightening and deadly.

A bird twittered above Rose as she relaxed beneath the tree. Thoughts tumbled through her weary brain, longings for home and a life she was used to. Fear of the unknown fought with a curiosity about the strangeness around her. As the day cooled, Rose went back into the house determined not to let India and the climate stop her from finding enjoyment in this new life. She stripped off her dress and wearing her cotton underclothes, climbed back into bed. She drifted into a peaceful sleep and from then on the dark dreams of death did not disturb her.

Sarah had a difficult time as she coped with the change of climate and lifestyle as well as the worry about Rose. The servants spoke English to her so she could understand them, but between themselves spoke their own language. They were gracious to Sarah as they helped her become accustomed to their ways and daily routine. However, she often caught the servants exchanging amused looks between themselves and she wondered how loyal they really were. Often she caught them talking among themselves instead of completing their duties. When she appeared they hastily scattered with hostile looks at her. India was a hotbed of rebellions, which were quickly overcome, as many of the people disliked the English rulers in their own country. There was very little for her to do and she spent a lot of time writing letters and reading while Rose was ill. The painting supplies were still unopened as she acclimatized herself to the heat and schedules.

William began work on cases before the courts. The court system was familiar, based on English principles but the people were difficult and unruly. He reminded himself over and over that this was the land of his hero and, like Robert Clive, he would succeed.

In the cool of the evening Sarah and William often sat outside beneath the Banyan tree sipping English wine or brandy.

"How's Rose doing, my dear?" William always asked during their first month in residence.

"Poorly. She can't get over losing Henry. I talk to her but she's too ill for much conversation so I don't stay long with her."

"When she's well, shall we send her back home? Perhaps this climate is too much for her."

"Perhaps. How are you coping with this heat? Is it much cooler in the courts?"

"There's always fans waved by young lads but it's never much help. I have to take frequent breaks just to get out of my robes and wig. The defendants are always querulous and won't listen. Then sometimes we need an interpreter and that makes the cases longer. In England the defendants are quieter and let the barristers talk for them. Not here, everyone has to talk at once. My head aches so much that I find it difficult to make a decision. Sometimes I wish I hadn't been appointed as a court judge and stayed as a barrister handling regular delegations"

"Do you have to work all the time, like you've been doing? I notice that many of the other judges aren't there as often as you?"

"Yes, my dear. Because they're not there to take the assignments. I have to do the extra work."

"Are you happy to be in India? It's not like the early days of Robert Clive."

"No, it's much more settled than when he first came with the East India Company. I will get used to the climate and the people just like he did. I have to as we're here for ten years."

"We'll forget what England's like after all that time," Sarah sighed, as she thought of her English home and familiar countryside.

"We can stay longer if you want, William said."

"Right now, I wish I could go home. It's too hot and everything's so different."

"Perhaps I should send both you and Rose home. I don't know what I'd do without you here."

"I'll stay, William. We'll both get used to this life. The other women here with their husbands have said that after the first year life will be easier as we will be used to everything."

"I know dear. It's getting through the first year. Have you done any drawing yet?"

"When Rose is better, I should have time. I haven't seen any birds to paint. I catch glimpses of some in the trees but not enough to observe what they look like for painting. I've ordered some cotton dresses and when they are finished I may feel more like painting."

"I wish my robes were lighter. Perhaps you could enquire about that as well."

"I will, William."

In the early mornings, when Rose was well again, she and Sarah spent time at the open air markets. There they purchased colourful baskets with woven intricate designs, ivory elephants and other fascinating gifts to send home. There was a confusing babble of languages as everyone seemed to speak in various dialects. Sarah and Rose soon learned how to barter for the items they wanted. They were always accompanied by a servant as most of the vendors did not speak English. Or at least they motioned that they did not understand that language. Crowds pushed and shoved through the marketplace in multihued colours and flowing saris. The brown-skinned women filled their woven baskets with a variety of spices, flour, strange vegetables and oils. They greeted the English ladies with wide smiles and animated voices. The servant with Sarah and Rose rudely pushed them away. Some of the vendors had birds for sale, strange birds that intrigued Sarah.

"Look at this one, Rose," Sarah said. "It looks fierce with that sharp beak. See how anxious it is to get out of that cage. His white

head feathers look elegant with his dark wings. This will be an excellent study for a painting."

"That is a Garuda, Memsahib," said the servant girl, Sasha. "You wish to buy? Garuda, a sacred bird, very valuable."

"See if you can bargain us a good price for it."

The girl spoke to the smiling, bowing vendor and haggled the price. He bowed again and again to the English lady and rubbed his hands together in contemplation of a costly sale. Sasha shook her head and she relayed the cost in English to Sarah. Then Sarah shook her head each time. The vendor raised his hands in the air, complaining at the low price then agreed to sell the bird at what Sarah offered to pay.

The vendor bowed low as he accepted the money from Sarah and handed her the cage. He had made a good profit for the bird that had been caught by his son. He smiled deviously at his son squatting on the ground behind him.

This first bird inspired Sarah to begin painting and recording the birds she saw. After capturing the Garuda's image, she released him. The bird soared into the warm air and quickly disappeared from sight. After the first painting, Sarah continued buying birds from the marketplace, small birds, larger birds, some familiar yet different from English birds. She was beginning to enjoy this new lifestyle in India as William grew more discontent with the heat and the people.

"These Indian people are so different from our English," William said. "They chatter all at the same time, in their own languages. Even the interpreters can't understand their words because they're said so quickly. It's hard to work out a reasonable judgment on the case."

William sipped the cool liquid from the glass in his hand. He slumped on the chair and wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead. Sarah sat in the garden listening to his complaints while

studying the anxious bird in the cage. The evening was cooler than the day and she wore a thin cotton dress that clung to her matronly body. William wore a suit, the jacket hung on the back of one of the chairs. His shirt was sticky and damp against his rotund shape. Sarah, William and Rose had been in Madras for over two years.

"You can't let that bother you so much. Make them talk one at a time, or only have one in the court at a time. Losing your temper won't make it easier for you."

"I tried that and putting one out of the court only made things worse. There were complaints that I was favouring one over the other. Court was so much easier back home."

"But we're not home. We're in India. You chose to come here."

"Yes, yes," William said as he poured another drink into his glass. "This tastes horrid."

"It's cooling."

William removed the glass stopper from his brandy container and poured it into the glass of weak lemonade. He gulped down the entire contents of the glass and wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

"Brandy makes you warmer," Sarah said, sighing unhappily.

"But it tastes better."

"You've been drinking at lot of brandy lately. Don't you think you should drink less."

"No. I need more to help me through these long days. I can't wait until rainy season and cooler days. Why did I think this would be a great adventure to follow Robert Clive here? It's so different from home. Eight more years – eight more!"

"If you really want to leave, won't the government let you if you are ill?"

"But I'm not ill and I signed an agreement for ten years. There's no way to go home before that time."

"Then learn how to deal with these people."

"That's all I can do. I have to deal with them."

William drank another glass of brandy and began reading a case file that he needed for the following day. Sarah sketched the bird in the cage that shrieked in a forlorn voice, answered by other birds settling into trees for the night. She felt sorry for its capture and would release it when her painting was completed. Rose wafted into the garden. She wore a bright pink, silk sari wrapped around her.

"You look very nice, Rose," Sarah said as she looked up from her sketch book. "Another party tonight?"

"Of course. What else is there to do here."

"Another young man, or is it the same one from last week."

"There are so many choices." Rose laughed. "They swarm me and I must choose one of them for each week. The gentlemen insist."

"Anyone you are particularly fond of?"

"Not yet. They are all fun."

"William and I have to attend a party, next week."

"I am very tired of these get togethers," William complained. "The men all talk about the same things and the women are always over dressed. Do we really have to go?"

"I enjoy them, William. It's nice to have something of England and share our news from home about our children. I miss them so much."

Rose straightened her dress tighter and let her thoughts fly home. She too missed her niece and nephew, but mostly Harry. Unreachable Harry that she might never see again. Her face reflected her gloomy thoughts but she pushed them aside and smiled. No, she wouldn't let them spoil tonight's gathering.

"Don't wait up for me," Rose said, as she opened and closed her dainty fan. "I shall sleep late tomorrow."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself," Sarah said, smiling at her beautiful young sister. "I won't disturb you."

William had fallen into a light sleep. His head rested on top of his case file and he snored. Sarah touched his shoulder and tried to rouse

him. There was no closeness between them now and the happiness they had experienced on board the ship had been quickly forgotten. William was always upset when they dined together and his conversation was mainly about his frustrations at court. Sarah read him the letters from Ann and Charles, but he didn't seem that interested in what his children were doing. Ann had become a desirable young lady and was about to become engaged. Charles was undecided about what vocation to follow. He did not want to study to be a barrister like his father. Sarah cried with each letter she received and wondered if she should go home. Her children were grown and did not need her anymore, but William still needed her. She had to be there for him, she was his wife and sometimes he was comforted by her presence. Sarah was thankful she had her bird paintings to keep her occupied. Many of the other wives were bored with their lifestyles, visiting each other and dealing with difficult servants. This was the reason for so many parties in the cooler evenings.

"William," Sarah said, shaking him awake. "Why don't you go to bed. You can read that file in the morning."

"What? Yes, my dear. I shall do that. Can't think much anyway. Are you coming?"

"In awhile. I just want to finish this sketch."

"Can't you finish it tomorrow?"

"Yes, William. I'll finish it tomorrow."

"Are you sorry you came with me?"

"Sometimes. I am getting used to this life and seeing these magnificent birds makes it all worth while."

"Birds, always birds. I get tired of you sketching birds. Can't you think about me more. I need you more than those birds."

"You're not always here. Sketching and painting occupies me when you're away."

"Well, I'm here now so put that sketching aside and look after me. Hand me my coat. I can't let the servants see me undressed."

"Yes, William."

Sarah helped him struggle into his coat jacket. She hid a smile, knowing that the servants wouldn't care if he wore a jacket or not. William led the way into the house carrying his thick file. Sarah followed behind carrying the tray of glasses and pitcher that rattled as she crossed the uneven paving stones. A servant bowed and took the tray from her hands. William swayed tiredly as he walked along the short hallway to their bedroom. Sarah helped him out of his clothes and he immediately slumped onto the bed.

"Good night, William."

William was instantly asleep. Sarah removed her dress and undergarments and climbed into bed beside William. She kissed him lightly on his cheek then turned her back against him. She wasn't tired and the warm air made her toss and turn. William snored as he slept, which kept Sarah awake awhile longer. Finally she settled and drifted off to sleep with unhappy thoughts twirling through her head.

In the early morning hours, when the servants were beginning to rise, Rose came home from the evening gathering. She stood in the front garden and said goodbye to her ardent admirer.

"Marcus, I promised you a week. I have to abide by the rules you and the others agreed upon."

"We hoped you would finally decide which of us you liked the most," Marcus said as he kissed her finger tips.

"There's none of you I like more than the others. I've tried, but I can't make that decision."

"Then I shall try harder than the others, Rose. I want you for my wife."

"I'm sorry, Marcus. I can't make a commitment right now."

"Then fair maiden, I shall keep trying. Goodnight sweet one."

Rose stood in the doorway and watched him walk away. She felt extremely tired and longed for bed. Instead, she walked into the

back garden and sat beneath the shade of the banyan tree. She closed her eyes and an image of Harry took shape.

"Oh Harry! How can I choose anyone that's not you."

When Rose finally walked to her bedroom she had tears in her eyes. She combed her hair and hung up her dress. Then she lay on the bed and cried softly into her pillow. As sleep overtook her, the dream returned. The gaping black hole and a closed coffin taunted her as she slept fitfully. Her destiny awaited and the future looked bleak.

Twenty-Six

Sleep was no friend to Rose. She tried to keep herself awake at night to avoid the torment of the dream. The stifling heat of the afternoon forced her into a restless sleep when the dream of death filled her with terror. At night she paced around her room and filled her thoughts with the image of Harry. She no longer attended the dinner parties that once gave her refuge from misery. Her ardent admirers called to persuade her to attend but she always refused. Soon they gave up and left her on her own.

"Are you tired of these events?" Sarah asked Rose one night at dinner when she noticed that Rose no longer went out in the evenings.

"They're always the same people gossiping about the same people. It gets very boring. It's been almost six years and I'm tired of them all."

"None of the gentlemen interest you enough to marry them?"

"None that I care to spend my life with."

"There's more coming each month, searching for their fortune," William said, slurring his words as he wiped the dampness from his face with his serviette. He beckoned to the servant who, without asking, refilled his glass with wine.

"Are you sorry you came with us?" Sarah asked as she stared anxiously at William who had already emptied the glass. "I will spend more time with you and we can tour more of India."

"And desert me," William replied as his glass was refilled. "Take that away and get me some brandy."

"You're busy all day in court," Sarah said. "You don't need me here."

"Why should you have fun while I sweat over these cases. You're my wife and I should be your first concern."

Rose pushed away her dinner, rose from the chair and hurried to her room. She did not want to become part of one of their arguments, arguments that erupted whenever Sarah and William were together.

"You have the servants to care for you. I hardly see you anymore."

"No, you're always painting those damned birds. They've become more important than me."

William grabbed his glass and swallowed the brandy. He threw the serviette at Sarah and it missed her.

"I'll be in my study so I won't disturb you."

"William, can't we go away during this heat. It makes you so miserable and you need a break from your cases."

"It's worse travelling in this heat than staying here. You know how I hate travelling these bad roads. My head aches enough as it is." William grabbed a full carafe of brandy and stomped angrily out of the room.

Sarah stared despondently at him as he left, tears glittered in her eyes. William was a stranger to her now. His attitude toward her grew worse everyday with his drinking. India had turned from a dream into a nightmare for him.

Sarah sat on the edge of the empty bed. For the past four years, William slept in another room. She wasn't ready for sleep, although the evening temperature was cooler. Sometimes, to calm herself, she re-read the few letters from England. The letters from Elizabeth cheered her but the ones from Ann depressed her. Ann, now a young matron at 21 years, was married with a child of her own, a

granddaughter that Sarah had never seen. The granddaughter, Mary, would be almost seven years old when she and William went home to England. Charles, aged 19, wrote once or twice a year and his letters were very short. He wrote of his ventures with his Uncle Robert, hunting parties and many young ladies. One letter from Elizabeth mentioned the death of her beloved husband, Jack, two years ago. Sarah was devastated, felt helpless, that she wasn't there to comfort Elizabeth in her sorrow. The letter had taken almost a year to reach her. Her letter to Elizabeth took almost the same time to reach England.

Sarah rose from the edge of the bed and opened her box of completed paintings. She pulled out one sheet, a golden-backed woodpecker. The bird's sharp claws clung to the side of a gnarled tree, his eyes watching for a meal to crawl past. Sarah had seen this bird on an early morning trip to the Bay of Bengal. The bird had tapped its way through the trees, ignoring the human intruder, so Sarah could easily capture his likeness. As she stared at the painting, the peace of that morning came back to her and she smiled. India was a disappointment for her but not the birds she painted. They were all as wonderful as Warren Hastings had said they would be. Carefully she put the woodpecker painting back into the box and pulled out another.

A young bird, one that had been injured by a larger one, stared regally at her. It was an oriental hobby bird. Sarah had found the bird under the banyan tree and rescued it. The bird's belly had black streaks below its slate gray wing and back feathers. She had fed it insects and it stayed for her to paint, until the hobby bird's wing feathers had grown back in. Warm memories of her time with it chased the darkness from her thoughts. Without these birds and her painting, Sarah suffered from the feeling of isolation. She and Rose were not as close as they had been in England.

As Sarah pulled out painting after painting, she pushed away the despair that ate at her. The house was silent until she heard a

moan from Rose's bedroom. She latched the box and put it against the wall.

Sarah knocked softly on Rose's door and called out, "Rose are you okay?" she asked. "I heard you cry out." Sarah pushed open the unlocked door and entered the darkness of the room. Once more she heard Rose moan in her sleep.

"Rose, are you all right?" Rose sat up on her bed, still dressed, and stared at the shadowed figure. "It's me, Rose. Were you having a troubled dream?"

"Sarah?"

Sarah moved toward the bed and lit a candle. Rose's face was wet with tears, her hair tangled around a pale face. She was shocked at the sight of her sister.

"Are you ill? Is that why you've been keeping to the house?"

"Oh Sarah! I just fell asleep without undressing. Perhaps that's why I couldn't sleep properly."

Sarah sat on the bed beside Rose. She wiped the wetness away from her face with the edge of the cotton sheet.

"I'm worried about you. There's something bothering you. Please tell me about it."

"You have your own problems with William. Don't worry about me. It's just the heat."

"Do you want to go home to England? Would that help you? There's a ship leaving in a few days."

"What do I have to go back to? There's nothing in England for me anymore. I shall stay until you and William go home in four years."

"Why don't you come with me on my painting excursions? It would be nice to have you along instead of the young servant boy that comes with me. We haven't talked much during the past few months. This would at least get you out of the house."

"Perhaps I will. I've been alone too much and I miss the fun we used to have at home."

"I miss you too. I've been so involved in painting that I've forgotten that you don't have something to occupy your time. Tomorrow we'll go to the market and see what kind of birds that fellow has captured for me. Or we can leave early before the heat and go to the river."

Rose got up from the bed and splashed tepid water over her tear-streaked face. Sarah watched her and wondered if she'd made a mistake bringing Rose to India with her.

"Were you having a nightmare that made you cry?"

"Just one of those dreams that I can't remember."

"Shall I get you a cool drink to help you sleep better?"

"No, I'm fine. I'll get undressed and wash. That will help me sleep."

"Then I shall return to my bed. In the morning we'll have an early breakfast and if you feel up to it, we can plan what to do." Sarah walked to her sister and hugged her. "I'm sorry to have been so neglectful of you. I get so caught up in painting these beautiful birds that I forget everything else."

"I'm glad you have something to do. I wish I liked painting but I have no interest in it."

"Sleep, now, Rose. I promise to spend more time with you."

"Goodnight, Sarah."

William struggled with the sheets on the bed. They were half off the bed, wrapped around his sweating body. He pulled at them and hurled them onto the floor. Immediately the inflamed rash, which covered most of his torso, began itching. He scratched at it, and part of the rash showed specks of blood. The rash itched constantly, especially when he wore his barrister's gown. Under the white wig he wore in court, William's head was covered with more heat rash. The salves that he used to cool the rash worked for a few moments, but it never disappeared. He couldn't sleep well unless

he was comatose from the brandy. William sat up and held his aching head in shaky hands.

Why had he come to India? He felt foolish for following a childhood dream that had led to this disaster. His dream of adventure in India had not included the overpowering heat, the monsoon rain that lasted for months, nor the lifestyle of India's people. He was stuck here for another four years of misery.

William got up from the bed and staggered to the wash basin. He immersed his face into the water and felt some of his grogginess fade. He dried his face with a towel and began dressing. As he pulled on the cotton shirt, the rash itched at contact with the fabric. William gritted his teeth until the itching lessened. Then he pulled on his trousers and once again felt the agony caused by the itches. He slid his feet into open sandals and left his bedroom.

"Where is the memsahib?" William asked as he saw that Sarah was not sitting at the table.

"The memsahib's gone out," a servant said, cowering beneath the look of anger in Williams black eyes.

"Gone out, before breakfast?"

"They took breakfast with them, Sahib."

"Sarah and those birds, most likely," William said as he sat down at the table. "Bring me my breakfast." The servant darted out of his way before William could vent his anger on him.

William's anger grew, using Sarah as the excuse. He scratched at the rash on his head and, in his thoughts, berated Sarah for leaving so early. His irritation increased as he ate alone while he scratched and tried to read the file for court this morning. Then he stood up, kicked the chair out his way and stormed out of the room. His fury descended heavily on the unfortunate petitioners in court that morning.

Sarah stared at the painting on her easel. She was working inside the house because, outside, the sun was too bright to see if she was

painting the bird's true colours. Rose was in her room sleeping before dinner. The sisters had spent the day by the Bay of Bengal observing the wildlife and watching boats sailing past. They took a lunch with them and had a delightful picnic.

Rose almost told Sarah about her dream and her fears, but didn't. How could she make Sarah understand the torment she'd been experiencing?

Sarah sketched the birds that flittered around them. She could see that Rose wanted to talk and waited for her to tell her what the problem was. Instead, Rose talked about the passing ships, the people in their vibrant colours, and asked questions about the birds that Sarah sketched. Sarah felt frustrated that her sister would not confide in her. She knew that if Elizabeth was here, Rose would tell her everything.

A strident sound erupted as William strode angrily into the room. His face was deep red and he was scratching at the rash on his neck. He threw off his suit jacket and tossed it on the floor for the servants to remove. One female servant darted out behind him and grabbed the jacket from the floor to put away in his room. The servants were all terrified of his anger and kept out of William's way. Sarah sighed deeply and got up from her chair. She walked toward him and he ignored her. Her brown hair, knotted behind her head with a few tendrils hanging loose, already had several white streaks. She was only forty-four. Her face showed traces of wrinkles around her mouth and eyes. The heat had dried her skin and although she applied lotion to her face twice daily, it did not remove the wrinkles. Her long cotton dress swished around her as she followed William to the dining table. Rose had been awakened by a servant who announced that dinner was served.

"You look tired, William," Sarah said as they sat down at the table.

"And you look like your day was pleasant," William sneered, his face scarlet from the heat.

"It was a pleasant day," Sarah replied. "Rose and I spent it down by the bay."

"How nice for you two. While you are out gallivanting I am trapped in a sweltering courtroom dealing with unreasonable people." William emptied the glass of wine and motioned to the servant to bring him his usual bottle of brandy. He filled the glass and poured the brandy down his throat. "Do we have anything else to eat except this tasteless rice and burning curried chicken?"

"We haven't had this for several weeks."

"Curried this and curried that. Isn't there some other spice that can be used with our meals?

"It's not always curried."

"Why can't these people cook a decent English meal?"

Rose silently ate her dinner. She felt sorry that Sarah had to endure these tirades from her husband. They had once been happy together. Now all they did was argue. Sarah had become a different person, so careful around her husband and not retaliating as she'd always done before. Was she now afraid of William and his anger?

"Bring me another bottle," William shouted to the servant who stood trembling in the doorway to the kitchen.

"Must you drink so much, William?" Sarah said, frustrated and anxious. "It only makes you warmer."

"Yes, my dear. I must drink more." William scratched at his stomach where the rash was now scabbed with blood from his constant chafing. "It helps these delicious meals go down. If I must eat this rubbish then I need something to get it down."

"I try to get the servants to cook something else. They can't always get the meat I ask for. I shall try again, William."

"You really are a worthless wife. Can't even get proper food for your husband." William shoved away his plate with his meal half-eaten. He pressed on the edge of the table and pushed his chair back. Standing up he grabbed the bottle of brandy and kicked his

chair over. "I am going to bed. Won't sleep scratching all night but at least I won't have to look at you." He stomped down the hallway and into his room, leaving Sarah in tears at the table.

"Sarah," Rose said, as she moved to her sister. "You can't let this go on much longer."

"I know," Sarah replied. "He gets worse each day. I wish there was some way to get him declared ill. Then we could go home to England."

"You must go home now. You and I will leave him. He won't miss you."

"He's ill. How can I leave without anyone to care for him? The servants would neglect him. I have to stay." Sarah covered her face with her hands as tears flowed across her face. Rose put her arms around her and tried to soothe her.

"Go to bed, Sarah. There's nothing more you can do for him tonight."

"I'm sorry you're here to see our misery. Why don't you go home? You're free to go."

"I can't leave you like this, Sarah. I can at least be here to help you through the next four years. Now come, go to bed and rest."

Rose helped Sarah to her room and made her lie on the bed. She kissed her forehead and went to her own room. Sarah slept for a few hours until the dark of the night made the temperature bearable. Then she awoke and felt restless. Getting up she removed her clothes and put on a long, cotton robe. She had left her painting in the sitting room and decided to put it away with the rest of her work. Lighting a candle she tiptoed along the hallway to the sitting room.

It was peaceful in the room and Sarah enjoyed a brief respite from her unhappiness. She set the candle on a table, then looked at her painting still sitting on the easel. She had only a few sheets of paper left and months ago had ordered more. It would be a long time before her order would arrive. There were almost two hundred

completed paintings in her box and she was pleased that she had been able to paint perfectly so many of the vivid birds that populated India. As she put the painting in the box, she pulled others out and relived the memories of how and where they were finished. She was lost in her own world of happy moments when a shrill voice shattered her peace.

"Sarah, where are you?" William staggered into the sitting room holding an empty brandy bottle. "I need you to get me another bottle." He saw Sarah crouched on the floor with a painting in her hand.

"Always birds, never a thought for your husband." William threw the empty bottle against the wall where it smashed sending a shower of glass over Sarah's head. She shook the pieces out of her hair and suddenly felt angry.

"And all you do is drink and complain," she screamed as she got up on her feet. "No more brandy. You've had enough for a lifetime."

"Birds, birds." William grabbed for the box of paintings to tear them to shreds. Sarah moved in front of him and protected her paintings.

"Go back to bed, William. You've had enough to drink."

William grabbed Sarah's shoulders and shoved her away from him. She knocked into the table where the candle sat, then lunged at him. He had his hands on her box and she fought to get it away from him. He pushed Sarah harder and she tripped and fell. She had torn the box away from him and as she fell, her head hit the sharp edge of the table. The candle toppled over and sputtered out leaving the room in darkness. William moaned as his head began aching and he staggered toward the door. He tripped over Sarah's leg and fell onto the floor knocking himself senseless. Sarah lay on the floor, unconscious, the box of paintings beneath her until a servant tiptoed into the room with a lighted candle. Soon all the servants were awake. They carefully lifted Sarah and carried her to bed. Rose hurried into the sitting room in time to see the servants trying to lift the unconscious William.

"Bad fight, memsahib," one servant stuttered out. "Bad fight."

"Is he dead?"

"No, memsahib. He alive."

"Sarah, is she all right?"

"Don't know. Her head bleeding."

Rose touched Sarah's box and felt the stickiness. She closed the box lid and carried it into Sarah's room. A servant was in tears as she washed the blood from Sarah's pale face.

"Will she be all right?" Rose asked. "Send someone for the doctor, immediately."

"Yes, memsahib." The servant ran from the room calling to the others in her own language.

The doctor came, complaining of being disturbed from his sleep. He felt the area of Sarah's head where it had been bleeding. His fingers probed the dent and the crack that split her skull.

"Is it bad, doctor?" Rose asked.

"Can't see much in the dark. It'll have to be morning before I can make a correct analysis. Don't worry. She'll probably regain consciousness in a few hours. I'll come back at first light."

Rose sat beside Sarah holding her hand for the rest of the night. Sarah's breathing was shallow, but she still lived. Exhaustion claimed Rose as she tried to stay awake. She fell asleep in the chair and the dream came again.

Terrified, Rose stood at the edge of the open grave and was forced to look down into it. An open coffin lay at the bottom. Inside lay a white-clad body, dark hair hiding the face. An unseen wind blew the hair away from the face but Rose could still not see who it was. In the dream she covered her face with her hands.

"Rose, look at me," a familiar voice urged.

"No, no," Rose cried as she stared at the body. "Not you, Sarah! Not you!"

The cry awoke Rose. Her sister's hand felt cold and clammy. There was no breathing movement from Sarah, no life in her body. Rose screamed and fainted as the doctor and the servants rushed into the room. They were too late to help Sarah.

Twenty-Seven

In 1807 the dream became reality as Rose stood at the edge of the open grave. She thought of all the years the dream had frightened her, tormented her with visions of death. Not her death – Sarah's. Sarah, who had been mother and sister to her. It was a waste of years worrying about when it would happen, how it would happen. Instead, she could have enjoyed India and perhaps seen more of the country. She could have been happy instead of fretting about death. Rose was angry with herself, but how could she know it was Sarah she was seeing and not herself? Sarah, gone forever. If only Sarah had left William she would still be alive. How could Sarah love someone like William, who in the end, treated her so vilely? Did all love die like it had between Sarah and William? Was love really worth it? Rose's thoughts were in turmoil as she watched the coffin lowered into the dark hole.

William was sedated as he stood on trembling legs between two of his fellow barristers. His face was pale and he hadn't eaten for several days. His shirt was creased and stained, his jacket and trousers wrinkled. No one except the physician went near him and he wouldn't remove the clothes he had worn since the night Sarah died. For the past two days the physician had kept him on laudanum to keep him from taking his own life. When William awoke to the knowledge that he was responsible for Sarah's death, he was inconsolable. He tried to kill himself with a pistol to his head, but was stopped by the physician who ordered the servants to watch him day and night.

Rose was angry and was found outside William's room carrying a knife. The servants prevented her from entering his room and the physician gave her a sleeping powder. It did not help her sleep. She paced continually around her room and muttered to herself about what William deserved.

The two barristers held William up by his arms. As the coffin was lowered William shrieked and crumpled to the ground.

"Sarah, Sarah, I'm sorry. I deserve to die with you."

Rose's face was a mask of anger as she stared at William. She wanted to push him into the grave and watch him die. She stood between the wives of the barristers, who each held her arm in theirs as comfort and to prevent her from injuring William.

The vicar stood at the head of the grave and read the funeral service. The gravesite was in the cemetery of St. Mary's church where he conducted Sunday services. He knew William and Sarah who attended sporadically. His face registered no emotion as he read out the words of the Lord's Prayer and sprinkled the soil of India onto the coffin. It drifted gently down and whispered against the polished wood. Rose fainted and sagged between the two ladies. They led her away as the vicar said the final blessing on those still living and for the soul of the departed.

William was taken home where he was to stay until the court could decide if he deserved punishment for Sarah's death. He immediately grabbed a full bottle of brandy and a glass, then sat outside under the shadow of the banyan tree. One servant, a burly male, was assigned to watch him. Rose was staying with one of the barristers and his wife. Birds twittered above William constantly reminding him of Sarah. Tears covered his face as he tried to drown the memory of what he had done.

"I didn't mean to do it, Sarah," he muttered over and over. "I should have come without you."

The brandy finally took effect and William sank into a drunken coma. The servant dragged him into the house and to his room to

sleep it off. On the table beside his bed, the servant left another full bottle of brandy. Word had been sent to England, to his children Ann and Charles, but it would be seven months before the news of Sarah's death reached them.

Elizabeth was devastated when the news reached her. Sarah's daughter, Ann, and daughter were in Wolford visiting Elizabeth when word came of their mother's death. Elizabeth was the one to tell Ann.

"Children, there is a treat waiting for you in the nursery," Elizabeth said to her children as they returned from their carriage ride with Ann. They hurried off to see what it was. "Ann, I need to tell you something unfortunate. Shall we sit in the parlour?"

"Are you alright? You look so pale."

Elizabeth sank heavily onto the stuffed sofa and held Ann's hands. "I've received news from India. There has been a death."

"About my mother and father?"

"Yes. Your father has been drinking a great deal and the heat has been cruel to him."

"Are they coming home?"

"Your mother and father had an argument and he hit her. She fell and hit her head."

"Is she all right?"

"No. Your mother died. She was buried in India. Your father is being held until the court decides if he should be punished."

"He killed her? I don't believe it." Ann slumped onto the sofa beside Elizabeth. "She'll never come home!"

Elizabeth put her arms around Ann as she began sobbing. They held each other and Elizabeth's face was wet with tears. She was still in sorrow over the loss of her beloved husband, Jack. Now she had lost her dearest friend.

A servant announced a visitor. Harry Waters, that Elizabeth had met again two years ago, had been scheduled to dine with Elizabeth

that evening. Since the death of her husband, Jack, he was a regular guest.

A year before Jack's death, he had been given a commission in India. Elizabeth was delighted that she could go with him and reunite with Sarah. She had been shopping for items to take with them when she saw Harry Waters. Harry was forty-six years old, and still a widower. His architectural services were in great demand and he was a wealthy man. Handsome, with a slim build, he was popular with the ladies and considered an excellent candidate for a husband. He accepted a few invitations, but none of the ladies interested him enough to marry again. Rose's last letter, the one she had written on her departure for India, had left him hoping that she had been wrong and he was waiting for her return.

Harry brushed past the woman standing by the shop window. His mind was focused on his latest commission that was difficult to satisfy the gentleman who had hired him.

"Harry Waters," Elizabeth said as he walked blindly past her. "Don't you know me?"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am. I don't recognize you."

Elizabeth laughed and smiled coyly up at him. "Of course you know me, Harry. I'm Elizabeth Rogers, a dear friend of Sarah Cantwell."

"Elizabeth! Of course. How dull of me not to have recognized you. It's been a very long time since we met."

"Have you heard anything from them in India? Does Rose write to you?"

"No, she hasn't written. I received a letter from her just before they sailed, but nothing since."

Elizabeth noticed the unhappiness in his eyes. She wondered what was in the letter that had upset him so much.

"Jack and I are going to India. It will be so great to see Sarah again. I'll tell Rose to write to you like she used to do."

"She won't write to me anymore."

"I'm sorry. Rose told me many years ago how much she loved you. Has she found someone else perhaps?"

"I don't know, and I can't mention what she said in her letter. It was a strange letter."

"Why don't you come home with me for dinner? I will tell you all about our journey to India."

A shop door opened and Elizabeth's daughter, Eliza, stepped out. "Mother, is this what you've been looking for?" She held up a bolt of cotton material. She was surprised to see her mother speaking with an attractive man.

"Eliza, yes that is exactly what I need. Come and meet an old friend. Harry, this is one of my daughters, Eliza. Eliza this is Harry Waters, a friend of Sarah and Rose."

"Hello, Mr. Waters," Eliza said, smiling her prettiest at him.

"He's coming to dinner with us tonight," Elizabeth said.

"Some other time, Elizabeth," Harry replied, wanting to avoid the young lady.

"You must come, Harry. I'll tell you all about what Sarah and Rose have been doing in India. Our carriage will arrive shortly and you must come with us."

"If you insist, I will come to dinner tonight."

Since their meeting at the shop, Harry dined frequently with Elizabeth and Eliza, as Jack was away in Wolford. They rekindled their friendship from many years ago. He was there, a month later, the night she received a letter from her husband.

"He's been ordered to Portugal so our trip to India has been delayed."

"I'm sorry," Harry said, "I know how much you were looking forward to seeing Sarah."

"I wrote and told her we'd be coming. Now I must write again. Letters take so long to get there. She'll be disappointed when she hears from me."

A few months later, Harry was once again dining with Elizabeth and her daughter. They were relaxing following the meal when a loud pounding sounded on the front door. A servant hurried to answer and carried a letter to Elizabeth while the rider was given refreshment. Elizabeth opened the letter then collapsed on the sofa.

"What is it, Elizabeth? Harry asked as the servant rushed away to find help for her mistress.

"Jack has taken ill. I must go to him tonight."

Eliza ran into the room after being informed by the servant that her mother had received an alarming message.

"Mother, what is it?"

"Your father is ill. We must go home immediately, tonight."

"I will go with you," Harry said. "I'll order the carriage."

The journey was long and frustrating as they drove from London to Wolford. The weather was vicious with rain and mud for the horses to slog through. When they reached Elizabeth's home they were too late. Jack had died from the cold he caught while out walking in the rain planning his trip to Portugal. He was buried three days later.

Harry entered the parlour for his monthly visit from London and saw immediately that something was troubling Elizabeth.

"Elizabeth, what is wrong?" Harry enquired when he saw the two women sobbing in each other's arms.

Elizabeth dried her tears with a lace handkerchief and looked up at Harry. Ann wiped her face on her sleeve as, earlier, she had used her handkerchief to clean her daughter's dirty face.

"Harry, this is Sarah's daughter Ann. We've had devastating news from India."

"Has Rose died?"

"No, not Aunt Rose, Mother," Ann said as she got up from the sofa. "Father hit her and she struck her head fatally."

"Harry, why did you think it would be Rose?" Elizabeth asked.

"Rose's letter said she feared her own death in India."

"William is being held for the court to decide if he should suffer for Sarah's death. I imagine that Rose will come home."

"Rose come home, of course. There's nothing to hold her in India. How long do you think it will be before she arrives?"

"Sarah's death happened seven months ago. It will probably be at least six months before she starts home."

"Then I will stay in London until she comes. I'm sorry, Elizabeth. I know how much you'll miss her. Now I must get ready for my journey back to London."

Rose sat on the bed where Sarah had died six months ago. Her clothing still hung in the tall cupboard, cotton dresses patterned with checkered squares, plain colours of yellow, pale blue and green. The box containing her Indian bird paintings was locked, ready for transport back to England. Rose opened the cupboard and yanked out the dresses. She threw them onto the bed as tears wet her cheeks. Rose held her face against a favourite dress that Sarah had loved to wear. Then she dried her tears and carried the dresses to the servants to keep or give away.

"The carriage is here," a servant boy said to Rose.

"Thank you. The trunks are ready. Make sure that box is included."

"Yes, Memsahib."

The trunks were loaded onto a flat wagon and Rose watched as Sarah's box of paintings was securely tied to the trunks. This was all she had left of her sister and she was determined that they would not be destroyed. She wanted the paintings kept for Ann and Charles so they would have something to remind them of their mother's life.

Rose remembered Sarah's paintings that had been left behind when she married, destroyed by their step-mother Jo Anna. These paintings would not suffer that same fate.

Rose stepped into the carriage and looked back at the house and the servants who watched her leave. She was not unhappy at leaving and the faces of the servants did not show any sadness at her departure. The driver flicked his whip and the horses pulled the carriage along the dusty road to the harbour. Rose did not look back as the house faded from view.

"Miss Purcell." the officer said, as he helped her up the gangway. "Your cabin is ready for you. May I show you the way?"

"Thank you, sir."

"So you're on your way home to England. Are you happy to be leaving India?"

"Yes, thankfully so."

"I hope this will be a pleasant voyage for you."

"I hope the weather proves to be fair."

"We can only hope, Miss Purcell." The officer opened the door and Rose entered the cabin and closed the door as he walked away.

After ensuring that all her trunks and Sarah's paintings had been stored in her cabin, she went outside on deck and leaned against the ship's railing. Memories of Henry Barston filled Rose's mind. Below her the waves swirled around as the ship cut through the deep salt water. She wondered what her life would have been like if Henry had lived.

Would she have married him? Would Sarah still be alive if she had? Then the face of Harry filled her thoughts.

"No," Rose said out loud. "No I wouldn't have married him."

"Two weeks out and the weather is still fair," the young officer said as he stood at the railing beside her. "Who wouldn't you have married?" He smiled warmly at her and laughed. "If you're looking for a husband, I could use a wife."

"Thank you for your kind offer, sir," Rose replied. "I am not in search of a husband." She smiled up at him.

"Then, I shall forever have a broken heart."

"You sir, probably have a lady waiting at home for you."

"A lady, yes, but not a wife. She says when I love her more than the sea, she will become my wife."

"Will you ever leave the sea?"

"Perhaps, but I hope not. Have a good day, miss."

The journey from Madras to London was slow, and uneventful. The weather remained fair and Rose enjoyed the voyage. Most of the other passengers were the East India Company wives on a visit home to England before rejoining their husbands. Rose knew all the wives but did not feel comfortable with them. They expressed their sympathy for the loss of her sister and gossiped behind her back about her death at the hand of her husband. William had been judged that Sarah's death was an accident. He would return to England in six months time. The wives tried to include Rose in their daily routine, but she felt that as a spinster, she had nothing in common with them. Their conversations were about husbands, children and their life in India. Rose could not add to these conversations so kept to herself.

At thirty-five years old, Rose was considered too old to be a marriageable lady. She had lost considerable weight during her years in India, which many considered a disadvantage. Her browned face always looked unhappy and she often drifted off in thought. She was still a very attractive woman and the officers and crew enjoyed looking at her. As the ship neared London, Rose became restless and paced the deck from early morning to late afternoon. She had written to Elizabeth seven months ago, when she knew the date she would be leaving. Would anyone be in London to meet her?

The ship was anchored in the harbour waiting to dock. A small vessel rowed out to it. A man climbed out of the boat and up the rope ladder to the deck.

"Where is Miss Purcell?" the man asked a crewman.

"In her cabin, sir."

"Take me to her, immediately."

"Yes sir. This way."

The crewman knocked on the cabin door where Rose was packing the last few items into one of her trunks.

"Almost ready," she called out.

"Miss Purcell, there is someone here for you."

Rose opened the door and stared at the man who stood beside the crewman. Her face suddenly went pale and she moved back inside the cabin.

"Rose," Harry Waters said, as he stepped into the cabin. "Rose, you're finally here."

"Harry, I didn't expect to see you."

"Rose, I'm glad it wasn't you that died."

"Oh, Harry. Sometimes I wish it was me."

"No, Rose. Not you. I've been waiting for you all these years."

Harry pulled Rose into his arms and held her tight against him. She could feel the rapid beating of his heart and she began to cry.

"I've been so lonely, Harry."

"No more, Rose. I want you as my wife. I was so blind all those years ago. We won't waste anymore time. As soon as possible, we will marry."

"Oh yes, Harry. You've always been the only one I loved."

Historical Notes

Author's Note:

In 1980 I visited the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In the shop I noticed four bird prints for sale and enquired about them. They were prints of paintings done by Elizabeth Gwillim, who died in India in 1807. The mystery surrounding her life and death inspired me to write a fictional story about her, changing the character names.

Many thanks to Eleanor MacLean of the Blacker-Wood Library, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, for supplying me with a complete list of Elizabeth Gwillim's paintings, including the few biography facts known about her.

Epilog

London, England 1924

Dr. Casey A. Wood, a surgeon and ophthalmologist, stepped inside a book shop. He was looking for drawings, or paintings, of birds or other animals. The shop owner discovered, hidden in his cellar, a package of thirty water colour drawings of Indian fishes. A clerk remembered a collection of bird paintings in a protective case. The paintings of Elizabeth Gwillim had been discovered one hundred and seventeen years after her death.

Today, 2009, her superb paintings are a part of the Blacker-Wood Collection of Zoology in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division at McGill University in Montreal. Lady Gwillim died in 1807.

Elizabeth Gwillim
1763 – 1807 (nee Symonds)

Paintings- Flowers – 12
- Fish – 31
- Birds – 121

"...Not only do the birds predate Audubon as originals, they are in some respects equal or superior as representatives of living creatures..."

"...They (the paintings) show an amazingly intelligent observation of form, weight distribution and of feather systems. There is absolutely no question that they were painted directly from living birds and/or freshly killed specimens..."

Hereford & Worcester Country Libraries

Information about Elizabeth Gwillim is largely unknown. The amazing fact is that her paintings have survived for 200 years. What is known is that the wife of Sir Henry Gwillim was a watercolour artist who painted flowers, fish and birds, mainly from India. As well as painting the birds, Elizabeth made notes about their habitants, life history, nesting habits, food and sexual habits. The backgrounds she painted were of the trees and shrubs specific to the birds.

Elizabeth was a well-informed zoologist as well as an artist, which was unusual for a lady of her era. Ladies of quality produced paintings done by brush and pencil, not detailed like her paintings.

Elizabeth was born in 1763 to Hester and Thomas Symonds, in Hereford. Her sister Mary was born in 1772. Henry Gwillim was born in 1760 and died in 1837. Thomas Symonds was an architect and stone mason.

Elizabeth and Henry were married before he became a barrister in 1787. Elizabeth's sister Mary Symonds traveled to India with them. Henry was appointed as a Puisne Judge to the Supreme Court of India in 1800, and began his duties in 1801. Mary Symonds married the captain of the ship on which she sailed back to England after Elizabeth's death.

The paintings, in the Blacker-Wood Collection of Zoology and Natural History, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University, Montreal Quebec, are being transferred to computer files. As well, letters from India to Elizabeth's and Mary's mother, have been located and are in England being transcribed.

The amazing survival of the paintings of Elizabeth Gwillim astounds me, and those who are working with them. The preservation of the original colours is truly remarkable. Although she died many years ago, she still speaks to us through her paintings.

Elizabeth Gwillim. *Purple Heron.*
Blacker-Wood Collection. Rare Books and Special Collections. McGill University Library.

Elizabeth Gwillim. *Crested Honey Buzzard.*
Blacker-Wood Collection. Rare Books and Special Collections. McGill University Library.

Elizabeth Gwillim. *Eagle Owl.*
Blacker-Wood Collection. Rare Books and Special Collections. McGill University Library.

Elizabeth Gwillim. *Indian Shag.*
Blacker-Wood Collection. Rare Books and Special Collections. McGill University Library.

Robert Clive – 1725 – 1774

Robert Clive was born in Moreton Say, Shropshire, England and in 1762 became Baron Clive of Plassey.

Robert was the eldest son and educated at Merchant Taylor's School in London, England. In 1743 the East India Company sent him as a clerk to Madras India. Robert was captured by the French and escaped in 1746. He captured a French area of India in 1751, Arcat, capital of Chandra Sahib, and with a small military force held the city for eight weeks until relieved. Other French strongholds were captured by him and a military force.

In 1753 Robert returned to England, and married Margaret Maskelyne. In 1755 he returned to India as Governor of Fort St. David. As a military leader he reduced the pirate stronghold of Gheriah in 1756; re-conquered the city of Calcutta in 1757. The British had been defeated and incarcerated in the "Black Hole of Calcutta." In 1759 his military strength repulsed Dutch colonial efforts.

Robert Clive returned to England and entered parliament in 1760 until 1764. During his absence from India there was disorder as British rule was disliked by the Indian people. Robert returned to India in 1764 and quelled the disorder. At that time he reformed the civil service in Bengal and began the empire of British India.

With poor health, Robert returned to England in 1767. There were questions about his style of rule in India and he was investigated by parliament for corruption. His enemies launched the attack but Robert Clive triumphed over them. This weakened his health further with depression and several suicide attempts. At age 48, in 1774, Robert Clive died by suicide and is buried at St. Margaret's Church, Moreton Say, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England.

Warren Hastings – 1732 – 1818

Warren Hastings was born in Churchill, Oxfordshire England in 1732, and in 1772 became the governor of Bengal, India. His once wealthy family had fallen on hard times so he went to India at age 16, to restore the family fortunes. He, like Robert Clive, worked for the East India Company. His talent for beaucracy raised him to become the first Governor-General of India,

During his time in India he was different from the usual English adventurer. He loved India and wore Indian garb and ate Indian food. He admired Indian art.

Warren Hastings believed that traders should be subject to Indian Law rather than British law from afar. Under his governance the framework of India's social structure was established. The division of people in castes and religion was instituted, Muslin or Hindu. He had few English born employees to do administrative work, or who knew the language, so he was forced to use locals for revenue collectors. He believed this was the best way to operate in India and knew that European Revenue collectors would misuse their authority. Some Englishmen took the opportunity to amass wealth by becoming involved in corruption and bribery. He could do nothing to stop it and hated their greed.

One of his enemies was Sir Phillip Francis. Warren had dueled with him and Sir Francis was wounded. In 1784 Warren returned to

In April 1763, unknown artist and naturalist, Elizabeth (nee Symonds) Gwillim was born in England. She accompanied her husband, Henry, to Madras, India, in the 1800s, where she died in 1807. In London, England, in 1924, a Dr. Casey Wood, surgeon and ornithologist, discovered in an 'out of the way shop of arts', Elizabeth Gwillim's watercolour paintings. Today, 2009, these paintings, painted two decades before Audubon published his illustrious Birds of America, are part of the Blacker-Wood Collection of Zoology and Natural History, at McGill University, Montreal, Quebec. Prints of several of her paintings of India's birds are included in this novel.

Birds on My Brush is a novel based on the few known facts of the life and untimely death of Elizabeth Gwillim. My character, Sarah Purcell, was born in the spring when birds were chirping the birth of their new offspring. As a child, and later as an adult, Sarah was obsessed with sketching precise details of the birds. She married William Cantwell, a barrister determined to live in the land of his boyhood hero, Robert Clive, an English hero in India's development. Sarah's younger sister, Rose Purcell, accompanied them on this journey. Rose's tortured dream of death in India hampered her enjoyment of this new life.

$16.95

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S0-GQH-876